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MARCO VISCONTI.

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MARCO VISCONTI:

BY

TOMMASO GROSSI.

TRANSLATED FROM THE ITALIAN

BY

A. F. D.

THE BALLADS RENDERED INTO ENGLISH VERSE,

BY

C. M. P.

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PREFACE.

THE story of "Marco Visconti" was written by Tommaso Grossi at the beginning of this century, and dedicated to his master and friend, Manzoni.

"Marco Visconti," like Manzoni's famous novel, "I Promessi Sposi," derives living force and reality from the contemporary chronicles upon which it is founded.

There is also another point of resemblance between the two novels. If Manzoni might have laid down his pen with the happy conviction that he had written "no line which, dying, he could wish to blot," Grossi was, in this respect, a worthy follower of his great master.

This last consideration has been the chief incentive to the translator in preparing a new English version of "Marco Visconti," which is now humbly offered to the public, in the hope of making the high merit of the original more universally known.

The translator is indebted to a friend for the English versions of the Italian ballads.

PUBLISHERS' NOTICE.

Two English versions of "Marco Visconti" have appeared before this, both of which are now out of print. But the publishers finding that this more recent rendering was in every way superior to its predecessors,

have been glad to arrange with the translator for its incorporation in "Bohn's Novelist's Library."

This edition is reprinted, after careful revision, from a more expensive one published in 1879.

MARCO VISCONTI.

CHAPTER I.

LIMONTA is the name of a small tract of country covered with chestnut woods, which hide it almost entirely from the view of persons sailing from the point of Bellagio towards Lecco, between which places it is about half-way, and immediately opposite Lierna. From the eighth century down to the time when feudal tenures in Lombardy were abolished, Limonta was an appanage of the monastery of San Ambrogio at Milan, whose abbot added to his other titles that of Count of Limonta.

At the point where the Abbot's territory joined the district of Bellagio, and where a stone still marks the boundary, there existed in the year 1329 an old castle, of which now no traces are to be found, as it was razed to the ground towards the end of that century.

This castle, at the date of our story, belonged to a certain Count Oldrado del Balzo, whose ancestors seem to have been at one time suzerains of Bellagio, now fallen under municipal rule. The Count Oldrado, though possessed of other estates in different parts of Lombardy, spent the greater part of the year here, in the society of his wife and an only daughter, who were, like himself, devotedly attached to their beautiful lake, set off as it was by the fine sky, and the soft, joyous, and luxurious climate of Italy.

Rich, illustrious, and powerful, owing to their con-

nections and possessions, the family of Balzo had always been considered the natural protectors of the inhabitants of the district, all of whom had, from father to son, imbibed a traditional reverence and affection for the family name.

But although Count Oldrado had succeeded to such a noble inheritance, he had not quite understood how to maintain it, and had forfeited in some degree the good feeling of the old vassals of the house. Not that his disposition was really bad, for he was, on the contrary, a good kind of man; but it fell to his lot to live in hard times and in difficult circumstances. Weak, timid, and vain, he was not endowed with the requisite vigour for effecting as much good as he would otherwise have desired.

About that time the Emperor Lewis, the Bavarian, had made a raid into Italy, and had taken upon himself to depose the reigning Sovereign Pontiff, John XXII., then resident at Avignon, by whom he had been excommunicated, and had set up an Anti-Pope at Rome, in the person of one Pietro da Corvaria, a Minorite Friar, who took the name of Nicholas V., whence arose that great schism which disturbed all Christendom.

The Duchy of Milan, which had so long groaned under the interdict fulminated against it on account of the Pope's hatred of the Visconti as determined adherents of the Ghibelline faction, declared at once for the Anti-Pope. The latter having in return removed the interdict from the Milanese capital, as well as from the other minor towns and the more considerable villages, the churches were re-opened, and the few remaining clergy resumed their ecclesiastical functions, and administered the sacraments as usual. But in the country, especially round the Lake of Como, the people, less influenced by party spirit, remained faithful to the true Pope, and refused to open the churches, regarding the priests sent to them from the capital as schismatics and excommunicate. There were, as may be supposed, in the towns many who sympathized with the peasantry, and, *vice versâ*, among the inhabitants of the country districts not a few shared the views of the majority of

the townspeople; so that we can well imagine that life was not altogether pleasant in those unfortunate times, few places being free from profanation, violence, and sanguinary strife between the rival religious factions, Frate Aicardo, Archbishop of Milan, and the Abbot of San Ambrogio, together with most of the abbots of the richest and more distinguished monasteries, had already sought refuge in flight; and the choicest portion of the clergy, both regular and secular, were begging their way through Italy and France. The archiepiscopal revenues, the abbeys, and the minor ecclesiastical benefices were either forcibly seized and retained by the lay lords, or else given up to schismatic priests, partisans of the German Emperor.

In this perturbed state of affairs Giovanni Visconti, a relation of the princely family of that name, who had been appointed Abbot of San Ambrogio in the place of the true Abbot Astolfo da Lampugnano, had sent to Limonta, as steward of the monastery, a thorough-paced scoundrel, who had been already condemned at Milan for coining and forgery. This man, in revenge for the fidelity with which these poor mountaineers served their liege lords, robbed and fleeced them without mercy, besides adding insult to injury by treating them as rebels to boot. The people of Limonta turned to Count Oldrado, and besought him to use his influence with the new Abbot, and also to intercede with the nobles so as to get their rights recognized. But they soon found that it was labour lost to have anything to do with him.

The Count had so many scruples and fears, that he would not commit himself to anything, nor risk falling into disfavour with the Visconti; and though pitying in his heart these unhappy victims, he would have left them to be flayed alive rather than make up his mind to stir a finger to help them.

Pelagrua (for such was the name of the steward of the monastery) became more audacious every day, and at last bethought him of a plan to ruin, at one blow, all the people under his authority, by a bold act of rascality, which would hand them over to him—body and soul, so

to speak—once for all, and so spare him the necessity of perpetually contending with individuals. He set to work, therefore, to unearth some old documents relating to Lothair Augustus's donation of these lands to the Monks of San Ambrogio. Armed with these, he meant to cause the people of Limonta to be adjudged not only vassals, as they were, but serfs of the monastery, and to summon them for this purpose before the tribunals of Bellano.

Bellano was then under the Archiepiscopal Court, by which term was meant an estate where the lord of the fief had his mansion and chapel, and pre-eminently the place where he administered justice: hence the decision of a suit of this nature properly belonged to the Archbishop's officials. But the Archbishop having fled from the diocese, many estates belonging to him on the shores of Lecco and in Val Sessina, and among them this very Court of Bellano, had been appropriated by one Cressone Crivello, a powerful noble and partisan of the Visconti; and therefore the case of these Limonta people had now to be decided, not by the archiepiscopal officials, but by those of Crivello. Now this new lord was too open a friend of the false Abbot of San Ambrogio, and too much interested in favouring the oppressions that he himself incessantly exercised upon his new vassals, for anything but evil to be expected from him for Limonta. We may be sure that the Limontese did not fail to cry out pretty loudly or to do their best to gain over Count del Balzo to their side. All their efforts, however, were thrown away. The Count, although implored both by his wife Ermelinda, and by his daughter Beatrice, who was as the apple of his eye, did not dare to undertake the defence of the wretched peasantry, who had to submit to be dragged before that incompetent and iniquitous tribunal, and await a sentence which they too well knew would be mere judicial murder.

Towards evening, on the day of the trial, the Count's falconer was standing on the battlements of the castle, and gazing down the lake as far as his eye could reach, to see if any of the vessels were in sight which were expected back from Bellano. At last he descried in the

distance a brown sail, which gradually increased in size as the bark that bore it neared the castle, and he at once hastened to carry the news to his lord. The Count was seated in a spacious hall, in an arm-chair with a pointed back, and a gay young page, lively as a Cupid, reclined on a low foot-stool at his feet. Condemned by his office to remain quiet in his place, the boy amused himself by playing with a large greyhound, which wagged its tail and pricked its ears with delight, and bounded about the hall in response to the caresses lavished upon it.

Count del Balzo was a man nearer fifty than forty years of age. From beneath a square black cap there fell on his temples two locks of hair, once of a deep red, which, when young, he had called, and still continued to call auburn, although now they were decidedly grizzled, and even might be said to be white. A thin and freckled face ended in a sharp chin, on which, whenever the Count spoke, there wagged a stiff, short beard of the same colour as his hair. Two small grey eyes glared from beneath his eyebrows, with an expression that had not lost its fire, but vanity and self-satisfaction were the main characteristics of that wooden face, with its artificially pursed-up mouth.

He bore on his wrist a superb gerfalcon, which seemed to revel in his caresses—now arching its neck, and uttering a low cry; now ruffling its feathers, and feigning occasionally to peck gently at the hand that approached it. When the falconer entered the hall the noble bird at once recognized its trainer, and, with outstretched wings and a somewhat louder cry, seemed to invite him to take it on his wrist.

"Well," asked the lord, "are they coming from Bellano?"

"Yes, sire, they are. Michael and his son Arigozzo have just disembarked on the beach at Carneccio."

The Count, on hearing this, handed over the falcon to the page, who left the room with it, whilst he and the falconer remained to await the arrival of the two boatmen, who soon afterwards entered the apartment.

The party consisted of Michael, the father, a man

well on in years, and Arigozzo, the son, a fine young man, about twenty-seven or twenty-eight years of age.

"What news?" the Count asked the old man.

"God's will be done!"

"Come; tell me everything."

"Well, then, I will tell you how it was: the bell rang, and there appeared in the Archbishop's portico that excommunicated wretch in the midst of three or four Scribes and Pharisees, who began to mutter out some cock-and-bull story, out of a lot of old parchments, fit only to wrap up salt fish, which he kept tapping with his hand, as if he expected them to utter a confirmation of his impostures. At last he changed his note, and began to tell the following falsehood: 'There was,' he said, 'evidence that the people of Limonta had always been serfs of the monastery, and he alleged as a proof that we always had had our heads shaved, and that it was but a short time since our hair was allowed to grow.' Could anything be more infamous than that?"

"But were there no witnesses?" asked the Count.

"There was no lack of them," answered Michael. "You may be sure that some would be found, even if our Lord were to be crucified afresh. There are plenty of people that would swear to anything for the sake of a cask of figs—a set of excommunicated Ghibellines who would sell their souls to the devil."

"And what happened then?"

"After that crafty old fox had finished, our advocate, Lorenzo da Garbagnate, began to state our side of the case. He said plainly enough that we were neither the Abbot's vassals nor his serfs, and that all we have done for the last hundred years has been to pay him his dues in the shape of poll-tax and tithes; to lend him our labour during the olive and chestnut harvest; to load his boats; and, in fact, to do just what we were bound to do, and no more. And then he finished up with a most extraordinary expression, which he said was in our favour. Don't you recollect, Arigozzo?"

"I remember he said something or other," replied the son, "about some right we had, but I never heard tell of such a thing before."

"Did he say that you were no longer serfs by prescriptive right?" suggested the Count.

"That's it! The very thing!" exclaimed both father and son.

"You see," said the Count, "I have all such matters at my fingers' ends."

"Then to prove this fact," proceeded Michael, "our advocate brought forward his honest witnesses, consisting of all the oldest inhabitants from all parts of the country."

"And then?"

"Then all appeared settled, did it not?" was the reply.

"But no, my lord. That Pilate of a judge invented something new, and said there were so many witnesses on both sides ready to swear to anything, that the case would never end: it must be decided by the Ordeal of God."

"The Ordeal of God!" exclaimed the Count.

"So he said," continued Michael; "and all the people began to applaud, as if he had given ever so fine a judgment. One called for the 'Ordeal of Hot Iron.' 'Boiling Water,' exclaimed another. 'The Ordeal of the Crosses,' said I, and told my Arigozzo here to offer himself on behalf of Limonta, which he accordingly did."

"And did they accept him?"

"No," said Michael; "because they were a set of rogues. But I have seen it written that there is no danger in the Ordeal of the Crosses. When I was a boy, I was once the champion, so to speak, of the monastery, and won a cause for them against Bellagio."

"Come, don't go on for ever," interrupted Count Oldrado, "but let us go back to our subject. What was settled at last?"

"There was a fine ending," said the other, "the Abbot's advocate would have the Ordeal by Single Combat, and the Archbishop's deputy of course agreed with the other, and so there was an end of it."

"A duel, *cum fustibus et scutis*, with cudgels and

shields?" asked the Count, sententiously; "because as it is an affair between common people, they have no right to weapons of chivalry."

"Yes," replied Michael, "with cudgels and shields."

"And who will fight for you?" asked the Count.

"Ah! that's only too quickly answered. But let me tell you first who has offered himself for the monastery: a great demon with red hair and such broad shoulders."

"Then you have not accepted the ordeal, you lazy cowards!" exclaimed Del Balzo.

"My Arigozzo wished to come forward," replied Michael, "but I would not have it. 'Twould be the last drop in my cup of misery were I to risk losing my son, who is the only comfort of his mother and myself, now that we are old and have no one else in the world to look to." And, turning to his son, he took him by the arm, and added, "Look well to yourself, and take care not to mix yourself up in the affair. I won't have it, unless you wish to kill me and your mother."

"You have said so to me three times already," answered Arigozzo; "so there is no help for it. Well, there are still four days left to find a champion."

"And for these four days I shall keep you shut up at home," said his father. "I'll stay to look after you—and you shall not defy me."

"Oh! bother take the man!" said the son, shrugging his shoulders with a rough but affectionate gesture, and the subject dropped.

Then Ambrose, the falconer, who, till then, had not opened his mouth, joined in the conversation. "And cannot we find a champion?" he said. "Why not get one of those fellows who will do anything for money? Pay him well, and let him fight for the rights of the country."

"No," replied the Count, stroking his beard with one hand, "that cannot be. The privilege of putting forward a champion for the ordeal not personally interested, belongs to the nobility and the religious orders alone."

"Then," continued the other, "we must either all be ruined, or get some native of Limonta to fight with the champion of the monastery."

"Just so," said the Count, sententiously.

"Oh! if my Lupo were at home," exclaimed the falconer, "or somewhere where I could let him know in time, those swaggering fellows should not have it all their own way."

"Tell me," asked Michael, "is not your Lupo page to Ottorino Visconti?"

"Yes," said the falconer; "he was page at first, when he went away five years ago; but now he is his squire, and the noble lord is very fond of him, and never likes to be without him."

On hearing this the boatman looked greatly relieved, and, rubbing his hands, exclaimed, "Then let us be off to Como at once, without losing a moment."

"What!" said the falconer. "Do you know that my Lupo is at Como?"

"I know," said Michael, "that Ottorino Visconti is there;" and turning to his son, added, "You saw him, as well, you know, when we were there on Tuesday."

"What! Was he that young knight who saluted us on the pier, and spoke to you?" said Arigozzo.

"Exactly so," replied his father.

"Oh! I saw him; and it was the same who was such a friend of poor Count Lionello—bless his sainted soul!—my lord's son here, and who stayed months at the castle to bear him company."

"Then," exclaimed the boatman joyfully, "let us go home and take a mouthful, and then be off directly, while the lake is smooth. The boat is ready, I suppose?"

"Yes," answered his son; "sails, oars, awning are all there, as, in order to get here without delay, I did not take anything out."

The father laid his hand on his son's arm, bowed to the Count, and made for the door, saying to the falconer, "Shall I tell him all my news in your name?"

"Yes, do so. Say everything in my name," was the answer.

"Good-bye, then, till to-morrow," said the other; "you will see me back with him," and went off.

"Michael," cried the Count after him, "remember to act as on your own account. Don't let anyone think I have had a hand in the matter. I don't want to get into trouble for you. Do you understand?"

"I understand," replied the boatman.

CHAPTER II.

THE next day, which was Sunday, the small church of San Bernardo at Limonta was open, and mass was being said by a friar sent from Milan, as the parish priest had left his cure on account of the interdict, and for this reason was still a fugitive in deadly fear of Pelagrua, who had vowed his ruin. The only persons, however, present at this service were the steward, or proctor, and his family. The people of Limonta, and also many from Civenna and Bellagio, were scattered about the little square, or grouped on the mountain side, or assembled round the fountain, a few steps above the church, discussing the great event of the day before, the approaching ruin to the district, the baseness and perfidy of Pelagrua, and whether it were yet possible to avert the coming evil consequences.

Four or five armed ruffians were marching up and down the square, trying either by fair or foul means to get the people into church; but the populace were too firm in their opinions, too irritated by late events, too numerous to allow themselves to be persuaded by fine words, or to be intimidated by the scowls of a handful of swashbucklers. The latter, at last, seeing they could do no good, gave way, and contented themselves with standing sentinel at the door of the church, and from that position attempting to induce those of the crowd who were nearest to them, to take off their hats or bow their heads in reverence to the mass. But the people all persisted in standing erect, and keeping on their hats, and amused themselves with passing in front of the sentries, laughing at them, even pushing them about, and provoking them with whistling and other noises.

Pelagrua, who was in church, kneeling near the altar, turned his head at these noises, and seeing such a crowd

of sinister faces and such rough behaviour, began to feel rather home-sick, and heartily wished himself and his family back in his own house, with his faithful guards about him. He, however, managed to control himself so as not to alarm those around him.

The celebrating priest too, under pretence of sending to the choir for the missal or some of the sacred altar-vessels, turned round and saw the scoffing crowd—a sight which did not altogether conduce to his comfort. The Epistle and Gospel never seemed to him so long, so he cut his discourse as short as he could, in order to get to the "Ite, missa est," as quickly as possible. And what would he and Pelagrua have felt if they could have heard the conversation going on outside, and how the popular excitement was rising?

"What an infamous injustice this is, and how quietly we are taking it!" cried a Limonta lad, chatting with other peasants.

"Why don't you go to Bellano and offer yourself as our champion?" rejoined an old white-haired man who stood by, leaning on an iron-shod stick, with his chin resting on his hands.

"That's a nice idea, Mr. Shepherd!" replied the first speaker. "Fight with that fellow! He's a sorcerer, and has a hundred charmed herbs woven into his clothes that will make his skin as tough as—as tough as the Grigna pelata."[1]

"Stefanolo is right. He is well known to be a magician," said another. "They chose him because no one could hope to pit themselves against him and escape with a whole skin. Those heretic hounds are all agreed together to torment us."

"It would serve them right," resumed the first speaker, "to begin to do justice for ourselves before they make us lose both body and soul."

[1] "La Grigna Pelata," a sort of coot or waterfowl peculiar to Lombardy, with long, featherless legs, and a skin so thick and impervious that it has become a proverb for toughness. Il Grossi may also have intended a pun upon Pelagrua's name in choosing "La Grigna Pelata" for his metaphor.

"You are quite right to speak of losing body and soul," said one of the bystanders, "seeing that the devil himself, in the shape of Pelagrua, is going to mass, now that to do so is a mortal sin; before, when it was the proper thing to do, he didn't trouble himself about it, and now he only goes to draw us on to our ruin."

"Why, he's always been a heretic," went on Stefanolo; "and whoever knew him in former days, knows he was excommunicated by our archbishop, and condemned to wear black crosses stitched on his cloak perpetually."

"And his trade before coming here to bully us, was to forge bank-notes," cried a fresh speaker; "and I have often seen him, when I have been at Milan at Christmas, to carry fish to the monastery for the quit-rent. I've seen him painted on the wall of the new Broletto, and with a placard underneath with his name and surname and everything. Fancy their sending us here this precious jewel!"

"And then, if storms come at seed-time, if the frost spoils the olives; if, when the chestnuts are husked, we only find peel and skin; if the fish falls from the line, or a boat is lost, then there are a hundred excuses: it was the weather, or the influence of the planets, or something or another; but I'll tell you what the cause is—it is this set of excommunicated heretics whom we have among us. Who can be surprised if the devil should often visit his own house?"

"Burn the house!" "Hang the villain!" "Throw him into the lake!" cried out many voices from the crowd which kept closing round the speakers.

Just then the mass came to an end, and Pelagrua, surrounded by his bravoes, issued from the church on his way to the monastery, which was only a stone's-throw off. The people began to press round, crying out, "Take the heretic, hang him, quarter him, murder him!" making a great noise, as may be conceived, but without harming anyone. Hardly was the procurator inside the threshold, when the door was banged in the face of the crowd, and good-night was the word; those inside are inside, and those who are not may be left out

in the cold. On this the mob redoubled their shouts, but as no mischief had really occurred, the storm would have passed away, if it had not been for an unlucky outburst of revenge on the part of some of Pelagrua's braggadocios, who, feeling humiliated at having retreated before a lot of clowns (as they called their opponents), were longing to be at them. Some of them having got up into a turret beside the door, began to jeer at the crowd and to irritate them in every way they could, and declared they would soon make them rue their insolence. On this the outsiders, becoming exasperated, began throwing a few stones, without, however, hitting their mark, which only made the opposite side increase their taunts, till at last one of the rogues above had his arm struck by a stone, and, turning quickly to pick up the offending flint, threw it down with all his force, when unluckily it dropped on the head of a child, nine or ten years old, who was among the crowd, shouting as loud as the rest. The boy had his skull fractured, and died in less time than one could repeat a paternoster.

This mishap was like a spark falling into a powder-magazine. The crowd, almost mad with rage, gave a general howl of execration, and shouted for vengeance. In the twinkling of an eye the door was smashed in. The bullies that ran up were upset and dashed to the ground, and an impetuous wave of people, rushing through the long passage, poured into the first court-yard. In a moment the house was full of terror and confusion. You could hear the noise of doors and windows being fastened in haste, as at the sudden approach of a tempest, together with the shrieks of frightened women as they crossed the galleries pursued by the invaders. Groans and cries might everywhere be heard, together with blows and prayers for mercy. The few wretches who remained in the tower had no time to save themselves. The people rushed up there furiously, and with their usual impulsive ideas of justice, threw them, one after another, down the castle rock, so as to break every bone in their bodies.

Pelagrua, who was rushing madly about the house,

was seized, together with five of his satellites, and tied in a chain with them. Some of the people wished to hurl them headlong from the tower; others to drop them into the lake with a stone round their necks; some advised hanging, and others burying alive with the head downward. This last proving the favourite idea, some of the mob ran off to fetch pickaxes and spades, and began to prepare some large holes in front of the church.

The wretched steward, white as a sheet, with his grey hair standing stiffly upright on his head, staring, vacant eyes, his ashy lips trembling, and his teeth chattering, kept repeating mechanically, in a weak, uncertain voice, "Confession, confession!"

"Oh! you heretic dog! I will confess you with this," cried Stefanolo, the young fellow who had been so noisy before, and had since been one of the most vehement of the actors in this scene. And, as he spoke, he rushed up with a cudgel, which he was in the act of bringing down on the steward's head, when the shepherd, who happened to be near, seized hold of his hand.

"What are you thinking of?" he said. "Are we to be worse than Turks?" Let him be confessed, if he wishes."

"And who is there to confess him?" said the other.

"Who? If there is no one else, there's the friar who came to say mass; he's still in the church, but dares not come out."

"That fellow! He is an excommunicated heretic, and cannot confess."

"Let's find some one else then—his reverence" (meaning the parish priest).

"And how is one to find him, driven away as he has been by these rascals? And besides, we are still under the interdict, and no one can confess now—not even he."

"At the point of death it can be done, and he has confessed others, don't you remember Tona della Casetta, and Giorgio del Mulino?"

"Well, well; but these rogues are not at the point of death."

"Yes they are." "No, they aren't." Some declared on one side, and some on the other, and then the clamour was terrific. "Yes, they can be confessed." "No, they can't." After they had gone on for some time in this manner, a voice was heard which settled the question in a way that quieted the crowd. "Directly they are confessed," it said, "we'll make an end of them; so that they may fairly be called at the point of death." "Yes, that's true; and now to find his reverence." "And where is he?" "Last night he slept at the boatman's." "Let's have the boatman." "Yes Michael; where's Michael?" No one had seen him all that day. "I saw Michael going to Como with his son yesterday evening," said one of the crowd. "But he must have returned, for a little while ago I saw his boat turning the point of Bellagio," added another. "To the boatman's house, quick, quick, run somebody!" cried many voices.

The boatman's hut was situated on the shore of the lake at the mouth of a little torrent called Auccio, about half-a-mile from Limonta towards Bellagio. The shepherd, who had undertaken to find the priest, met him on the road, in company with the two boatmen, father and son, and a third person, Lupo, the falconer's son, all three just arrived from Como.

The vicar, a good old man, who carried his years lightly, was hastily ascending the steep mountain path in front of the others, when turning a corner of the rock suddenly, he looked up and saw above him the man who was coming down to fetch him. He then stopped abruptly, and called out, "Giammatteo" (the goatherd's name), "what is this great disturbance about, down at Limonta? One would think the world was coming to an end."

"Your reverence," panted the man, quite out of breath, "come as quickly as you can; no one but you can do anything; make haste, they have taken the palace of the monastery, and are playing the devil there; they

want to murder the steward and his men; make haste for God's sake;" and the priest hastened away.

Directly his brown cowl appeared at the square they all began to cry, "Here's his reverence!" and, hastening to meet him, they proposed to him, as a matter of course, to confess Pelagrua and his followers at once, because they wished to kill them. The good man had need of all the authority which his ministry gave him—of all the affection won by a long life spent for the good of his people, and of the fresh glory he had acquired from his persecutions—to dissuade these madmen from their desperate resolve.

What helped most to calm their boiling passions was the news that soon spread through the crowd, that Lupo had come, ready to fight for his country against the champion of the monastery. The crowd immediately pressed round the falconer's son, who implored them to cease from shedding blood, and remain quiet, and to trust to him. Meanwhile the priest entered the steward's house and managed, after a while, to persuade those who had remained there to pillage, to go quietly away. When he had settled matters in the outer court, he passed into the interior of the house, where, fancying he heard a faint cry from above, he went up a wooden staircase, till he came to a door on the landing. On looking through a crevice into the room, he saw, close to one of the side walls, a woman on the ground with dishevelled hair, holding a child tightly to her bosom, and striving to stop its cries with her hand. He recognized her at once as Pelagrua's wife, and knocked gently at the door, whispering at the same time, "I am the priest. Open the door, for all is quiet." The poor mother started so suddenly at the first sound that she removed her hand from the child's mouth, who uttered a sharp cry, which was stifled in a moment; but when the priest went on to say, "Do not be afraid, it is I, all is over!" she sprang up, and turning a large key, opened the door, and showed herself with the baby in her arms to her deliverer.

"Oh! God has sent you!" said the poor creature,

trembling all over. "He will reward you: not for my sake, but for the sake of my poor little angel," and so saying, she caught hold of the priest's clothes and kissed them and bathed them with tears in a delirium of joy and gratitude. "And my husband?" she asked anxiously.

"He is safe," said the priest, and went on: "It will not do for you to be seen about here; go out that way," and pointed to a secret entrance, which opened on the left towards the mountain. "Take the path that leads to the castle, and beg the Count, in my name, to take you in for the night."

"Oh! but he will refuse, for——"

"Well, show yourself to Ermelinda, tell her—but there is no need to tell her anything. You want help, the Countess will welcome you eagerly, you may be sure. Go, in God's name."

The woman departed, and the vicar returned to the square, where the crowd still surrounded the falconer's son.

"Listen!" he called out. "We must take care that everything is done rightly and in the proper forms, so that we cannot be found fault with by the Archbishop's official and by the lawyers, who have more quibbles and tricks at their fingers' ends than hairs on their heads. We must take your votes, and all assemble here to nominate as your champion this good fellow, whom God has sent to us."

Presently the sacristan of the parish came out on a platform in front of the church, and began to beat, with two little hammers, on a machine composed of a bronze plate, set in the middle of a square table, producing a sharp sound in a kind of cadence, alternately fast and slow. This was a summons to the scene of action, and the machine was called *majola*, perhaps from *malleus*, the hammer with which it was struck, or more probably from *mallum*, the assembly which congregated at the sound. The people assembled, the question was put, and the votes given. Lupo, as may be guessed, met with no opposition, and was proclaimed unanimously by the whole neighbourhood the Champion of Limonta.

Owing to the interval which had already elapsed, and the new interests which occupied their minds, the first outburst of anger and desire for vengeance had subsided, and the multitude, new to bloodshed, began now to experience the reaction naturally resulting from their late proceedings. They now desired to leave the place, to withdraw from the sight of so many witnesses, and to conceal, in the tranquillity of their own homes, the part they had taken in an outbreak, which they now clearly foresaw would recoil on the perpetrators, so that they slunk off quietly, like whipped curs, in different directions, and in a few minutes all was solitude and silence. But, notwithstanding this, Pelagrua would not trust himself to remain in the country, which was getting too hot for him, so he went down to the shore of the lake, and, finding a boat, entered it with a few of his followers, and as many of his household as had escaped from the massacre, without waiting to be rejoined by his wife and child, who he learnt had taken refuge in the Count's castle. As he left the shore he looked back at Limonta, and cursed the place, swearing to return before long with the Abbot's forces to take his revenge.

But the Abbot, having heard from a messenger of the whole proceeding, flew into a rage with the steward himself, and finding he had gone to Varenna, sent him a most insulting letter, threatening to deprive him of his office, and saying he would make him rue his cowardice, in allowing himself to be beaten by a handful of clowns, and driven from the district in so disgraceful a manner. As to the poor people of Limonta, I need not say that the Abbot vowed summary vengeance upon them. But even the great cannot always do as they like. In those turbulent times the prelate had to keep his eyes and hands employed in different places at once, and could not bring together at a moment's notice the forces necessary for his purpose. He, therefore, pretended to do nothing, and let matters take their course, until he knew the issue of the pending trial at Bellano, which, he felt sure, would render these mountaineers more helpless than before, and put them irrevocably in his

power, reserving to himself, however, in any event, the privilege of falling upon them if necessary on the first opportunity.

Lupo now went off at once to the castle of Count Oldrado, where he had been born, and where he expected an affectionate welcome, not only from his parents, but from all the inmates of the place. The news had already arrived of his appearance in Limonta, and of the efforts he had made to appease the furious riot that was going on there. Yet, although many had wished to do so, no one went out to meet him, because the Count, who, at the first rumour of the outbreak, had locked his gates and let down the portcullis, to guard against any attack, would not hear of anyone stirring out till all was quiet. There was really no necessity for this, for although he was not so popular in the neighbourhood as his ancestors had been, there was still so much reverence felt for his name that no one would dare to utter a word against him or any of his belongings.

Admitted at last within the walls, the falconer's son was greeted by all in the castle with the utmost joy and delight, especially as it was five years since he had been seen in those parts. His father and mother snatched him one from the other to embrace him over and over again, whilst on all sides questions were poured upon him as to his affairs; and countless blessings were showered upon him. Count Oldrado—though by no means displeased that the poor Limontese had found some one to take their part, and especially one who was clearly a match for the champion of the monastery—would, however, at any other time have restrained himself from evincing his delight, in order not to appear to disagree with the Abbot, who was the strongest of the two; but just then the people of Limonta had also shown their teeth and were nearer to him than the Abbot. His timid disposition, therefore, led him to make some demonstrations in their favour, especially as at the entreaty of his wife and daughter he had given an asylum to Pelagrua's wife and child, and was now alarmed lest the mountaineers should take offence at this act of kind-

ness. These reasons caused him to give our Lupo a most hearty welcome, and the caresses he showered on him quite astounded and confused the recipient. They were, however, quite sincere; for the new-born apprehensions of the Count had removed the restraints arising from his former fears in respect of his reception of the young retainer, who was now on many accounts so precious to him.

Meanwhile, Ermelinda, the Count's wife, was sitting in a room on the ground-floor reading the gospel of the day to her daughter Beatrice, and a young maiden who attended on them, by name Lauretta, the daughter of the falconer. It was her custom to do this every Sunday, now that, on account of the interdict, they could not attend service in the parish church. She read in Latin, which at that time was still understood throughout Italy, much as Tuscan is in the present day; that is to say, in proportion to each person's culture and education.

They were all three sitting together at a small table. Ermelinda was not above forty years old; tall and stately, and of a majestic and pleasing expression. Her face was pale and colourless, and her eyes were too often cast down, as if oppressed by some former sorrow which had never been shaken off.

Beatrice was the exact image of her mother, with the same beauty of feature, the same elegance in her form, the same expression in her face and eyes; but all in her was set off by the fresh beauty of the springtide of life, and enhanced by a sense of happiness and by that mysterious essence that exhales from the soul as yet ignorant of the misfortunes of life, and scarcely, so to speak, conscious of its own existence.

When the mother had finished reading, she shut the book, and said to the attendant, "Will you go and see if there is anything that poor woman is in need of?"

Lauretta went out, and soon returned to say that she was provided with all that she required, and was now recovered from her great anxiety. She sent the Countess her thanks and blessing, and a request to be sent with

her child to the place where her husband had taken refuge.

"You told her," said Ermelinda, "that I advise her for her own good to stay here till the evening, when I will have her escorted to Varenna?"

"I told her so," said the maiden, "and she soon acquiesced, and said that she would always pray the Lord to bless you and your house."

"May God have mercy on her!" said Ermelinda; "she was always a gentle and good woman, and did not deserve to have such a husband;" and she repeated with a sigh, "the Lord have mercy on her!"

Here a knock was heard at the door, and the Count entered, leading the falconer's son, and presented him to his wife and daughter, saying: "Here is our good Lupo, who has come to defend the cause of Limonta."

Ermelinda and Beatrice received him with dignified but kindly courtesy; but Lauretta, as soon as she saw the long-desired face of her favourite brother, whom she had not set eyes on for several years, could not control the first impulses of affection; so, running to meet him, she threw her arms round his neck, and held him tightly for a few minutes without speaking; then drawing back for an instant, she blushed deeply, and smiling, half with shyness, half with vexation, said in a trembling voice, "What a silly girl I am! I am so pleased to see you, and yet I cannot help crying."

CHAPTER III.

IT was the day appointed for the trial by battle. A company of Crivello's soldiers kept back the crowd with difficulty, on the Piazza di San Giorgio at Bellano, round an open space in the centre, whence came a mingled noise of saws, hammers, and the voices of workmen who were putting up the barricades as fast as they could.

On the left, looking down the square towards the lake, stands the Archbishop's Palace, a long edifice built of rough-hewn stones, with pointed windows, divided down the centre by light columns of black Varenna marble. On the right hand, and in front were several thatched cottages, and in the rear was the church, then dedicated to St. George, with pointed arches in front and a large rose window full of tracery in the centre, while between the window and the door was a stone statue representing the patron saint on horseback in the act of piercing with his lance the well-known dragon. On each side were two statues, one of St. Christopher, with the infant Jesus on his shoulder, the other of St. Anthony with a bell suspended to the top of a staff; both the work of great sculptors, who swarmed in Italy at that time—figures of vast dimensions covering nearly half the front of the church; conventional representations of God and the Saints, according to the custom of the time, as if the artist was attempting to indicate supernatural power by supernatural size.

The church door was wide open, and, inside, a swarm of armed retainers were surging to and fro, clad in all manner of garbs; waifs and strays got together in frenzied haste by Cressone Crivello, who had summoned all the estates and castles in his possession to equip and send to him forthwith all the men-at-arms that they

were bound to furnish according to the terms of feudal investiture. This extraordinary display of force had been made on account of the rumours that had reached him of the revolt of the people of Limonta; he fearing lest besides these insurgents who had assembled to witness the trial by battle, the Bellano people might be inclined to give some trouble, suffering themselves also severely from the yoke imposed on them by the usurper.

In order to get a better idea of what type of people these were, we will repeat a dialogue that took place in the church, between a chamois hunter from Pagnona, a village on the high lands of Legnone, and a baker from Mandello, a large town on the shores of the lake, in the direction of Lecco. The hunter wore a leaden-coloured doublet of mixed material, which came down nearly to his knees; a pair of tight-fitting pantaloons reaching to his ankles; his feet were cased in wooden shoes, fastened with string, the soles of which were shod with long iron spikes, used by mountaineers to prevent themselves from slipping when running along the tops of the mountains or at the edge of formidable precipices. A flask and a drinking horn were slung over his shoulders, and he carried on his back an ashen bow with some arrows tied to the string. The baker wore a jerkin of white cloth, with tight sleeves fastened at the wrists with brass buttons, a gaberdine trimmed with bearskin, a square cap on his head, and a rusty dagger by his side.

This latter personage was standing with one shoulder leaning against the holy-water basin, listening to the babble that was going on around, when, seeing the hunter passing close to him, he laid his hand on his shoulder and said—

"Holloa! friend Lorenzo, are you too at Bellano?"

"Certainly I am; why not? That animal, Crivello, won't let one be quiet a minute, bad luck to him!"

"For heaven's sake be quiet; don't you know that's language forbidden by statute? You'll be fined ten francs or else get a taste of the rope's end."

"Oh, tell the statutes to come after us to Legnone, and we'll settle that matter!"

"But how came you here?" asked the Mandello man, "you who have not a rood of land, nor a roof to your head. You are come as a substitute, I suppose?"

"Yes, for our parish priest; he holds his living on condition of paying tithes, and of serving in the Archbishop's guard four days a year; but now that the Archbishop is gone, there is not a soul in the country who can endure the notion of going to serve those excommunicated scoundrels. Crivello swears that he will take the priest's glebe away, and worse than that; so the poor wretch has to dodge about in order to comply with the summons; now paying one man as a substitute, now another. This time he has tried it on with me, and as there are no chamois left, and still fewer bears, what had I to do at home? So I said to myself, 'Let's go and have a look at this fighting match, the like of which has never been seen this many a year;' and so here I am."

"I am here on my own account," said the baker. "You know I hold that little house of mine at a quit-rent of four days' armed service a year. Please God this is the last of them, and my papers will prove that; and if this fine master of ours means to go on as he did all last year, and oblige us to be under arms for ever, I don't mean to stand it; and already every one at Mandello declares they won't bear it any more, and there will be a slight unpleasantness, as there has been just now at Limonta."

"It's true then, is it, that the people of Limonta have been up in arms?"

"Indeed they have; they have murdered Pelagrua, and set the monastery buildings on fire."

"Well done, indeed!" exclaimed the hunter.

"Yes; but now they say that the Abbot of San Ambrogio is as furious as a Turk, and swears by all the saints that he will pay them out handsomely."

"There's many a slip between the cup and the lip; the matter has to be settled here before the regular tribunals. If the Limontese champion gets the best of it, I should like to see anyone meddle with him.

You would have the whole of the Lake of Como in revolt."

"You are very young, friend Lorenzo," interrupted the baker. "You don't yet know that reason is always on the side of counts and lords, and rags and tatters go to the wall."

"But here, you see, we are all of one mind," urged the hunter.

"All of one mind! What a ridiculous idea! Do you see those forty lances up in the square? Who do you think could touch them? All armed *cap-à-pie*, so that you could make no more impression on them than on a stone; and a resolute set they are, and ready to run all risks for anyone who will pay them, if it were the devil himself."

"But what would you say about us?"

"Why, here we all are, a useless crowd, of no more account than a lot of scarecrows, and they keep us shut up in church, as you see, for fear we should go roaming about, making common cause with the Bellano folk; but, however, if we got the chance to bowl these fellows over, do you suppose we should not do our part as well?"

"Certainly we should," answered the mountaineer resolutely.

"Bravo, bravo!" rejoined the baker, smiling. "I told you you were a young greenhorn; and what's more, if to-day the Mandello people, for instance, were to keep the Bellano folk to their bargain, to-morrow, so to speak, Bellano would come to Mandello, and do the same to us. To-day I am the stick, as the saying is, and you are the ass; to-morrow you are the stick and I am the ass; but the driver who whacked us to-day will repeat the dose to-morrow, and next day, and the day after, and so on to all eternity, so long as the world lasts."

Here the conversation was interrupted by the approach of one of Crivello's forty lancers, who was pacing up and down amongst the rustic soldiery to keep them in order.

Meanwhile in the great hall of the Archbishop's palace there were assembling lords, knights, and castellains, ladies and high-born damsels from the castles and fortified places all round the lake vying with each other in the beauty and magnificence of their dress and appointments, and in the number and splendour of their respective retainers.

A long room, opening into the hall, was swarming with pages, valets, and squires, while the vast court re-echoed the tramping of the horses, the baying of the hounds, and the shouting of the retainers.

One might easily question the advantage of these feudal lords travelling about with such trains of servants, and especially horses, through a small strip of country between the lake and a steep rocky mountain—a country utterly inaccessible except by boat or by narrow hill-paths. But such is the way of the world; a retinue is needed often merely for show, and to enhance the riches and magnificence of the owners to the lookers-on.

The other rooms of the vast building, along the front facing the square, were crowded with people of inferior rank, who were there either as retainers of some lord, or as friends of some squire or equerry, or by means of a silver key adroitly slipped into the hand of a sentry, and thence transferred to his pocket for safer custody.

Together with the cavaliers and noble ladies, there passed into the privileged hall the respective advocates of the monastery of San Ambrogio and Limonta. They were each habited in a long robe of violet-coloured silk, with a red hood lined with ermine, the point reaching down to their heels. But the Limontese advocate did not, like his opponent, hold in his hand the silver mace, an honour reserved specially for those who defended the rights of hospitals, monasteries, and other ecclesiastical bodies.

With the advocate of Limonta walked Ottorino Visconti, Lupo's master, who had promised the squire to come to Bellano on the day of the trial. He was a graceful knight of about twenty-six years old; and we must trespass a while on our reader's attention in a

description of him, for he will play a great part in the following narrative.

Ottorino Visconti was the son of Uberto Visconti, the brother of Magno Matteo, and cousin of Galeazzo the First, who had died the year before our story begins. Ottorino was, therefore, also the cousin of Marco, Luchino, and Giovanni, the other three surviving brothers, all sons of Matteo.

The noble boy was hardly old enough to wear a cuirass when he placed himself under the command of his cousin Marco, then a man in the prime of life, and celebrated as one of the boldest condottieri in Italy. He had practised the military calling under the eyes of that great captain, by whom he was loved as a son, received at his hands the military belt, and eagerly followed his banner.

Our hero was richly dressed in crimson velvet, with an azure mantle, embroidered in silver and lined with sable; a large gold chain went twice round his neck and fell on his chest. From under a hat of the same colour as his mantle, escaped, in graceful ringlets, a quantity of black locks flowing over his shoulders, and a white feather, which drooped from his hat, formed a striking contrast with the colour of his hair. His bright eyes shone with a tempered fire, his face was slightly sunburnt; he was tall, with well-proportioned limbs, resolute and haughty in every gesture and movement.

Lorenzo Garbagnate, the advocate of Limonta, was relating to him the late events at that place, and the honourable part his squire Lupo had taken in them, and the story made the young knight's heart glow with pleasure.

The conversation then turning on Count Oldrado and his family, Ottorino asked after Beatrice, whom he had known as a child at her father's castle, and the advocate told him what a beautiful creature she had become in the last few years.

"And is it true that she is so like her mother?" asked the youth.

"As like as two drops of water; but you will see

her to-day, as I hear her father is to bring her to see the duel."

"And at what hour will the trial begin?"

"Six hours after sun-rise, unless some fresh difficulties arise, which I rather apprehend."

"What difficulties can arise? Is not everything arranged?"

"Yes, but this interdict complicates everything. Crivello's deputy has arrested the parish priest for refusing to bless the arms. The priest protests he had rather suffer martyrdom than incur excommunication, and as his persecutor is equally obstinate, the affair threatens to be serious."

"But can't they find some other priest?"

"Who would take this burden on himself? The Vicar of Limonto was here just now with Lupo, but when he heard the turn things were taking, he slipped off through the crowd."

"Why, what is this new disturbance?" said Ottorino, turning to look at the company, who were crowding from all parts of the hall round a man in the centre, who had just arrived.

"It must be some minstrel," said Garbagnate, and so it turned out to be. It was a man in a fantastic dress, with two rows of silver bells on his doublet, hosen, and mantle, with a funnel-shaped hat on his head, also surrounded with bells. He carried a lute on his shoulders, and as he began to touch the chords he accompanied the sounds with the most ridiculous antics, which caused great merriment.

"Tremacoldo, Tremacoldo!" exclaimed the knights and ladies. He was a famous minstrel, well known at fairs and tourneys, as well as at the courts of every prince in Italy, and, in short, wherever people were assembled together. He knew a thousand tricks and jests; he had at his fingers' ends all sorts of fantastic games; he told the newest jokes, the finest stories, and sang the poetry of the most celebrated troubadours of that day, himself not amongst the least of them.

"Tremacoldo," cried many voices, "sing 'The Prisoner's Lament.' Yes, 'The Swallow.'"

"No," said another, "sing the last ballad you composed when you fell among thieves."

"Well, which will you have?" asked the minstrel.

"The last."

"No, no; the other."

"'The Swallow,' then."

"Yes, 'The Swallow.'"

Then Tremacoldo, after a pathetic prelude on the lute, began:—

Swallow, ever wand'ring swallow,
Alighting near my cell,
Where, day by day, thy plaintive lay
Dost, soft recording, tell,
What would'st thou in thy song declare,
Wand'ring pilgrim of the air?

In drear oblivion, sad, alone,
Left by thy cruel mate,
. . . .

But suddenly his audience, so closely gathered round him, broke up, and left him on the appearance of a new attraction. Beatrice, the Count di Balzo's daughter, entered the hall at that moment, holding her father's hand. While Ottorino embraced his former host, and bowed with chivalrous courtesy to the young lady, Tremacoldo, irritated against the new arrivals, who had scattered his listeners, came forward angrily to throw at them some sharp word, and to transfer to them the contempt he thought they had brought on him; for in those times—when the nobles were so far above all else, and were so disdainful and so thin-skinned that woe to anyone who provoked them—in those times we say, the minstrels and buffoons were privileged people, to whom every kind of liberty of speech and action was accorded, and insulting sarcasms allowed, which would not pass without bloodshed between knights.

So Tremacoldo came forward in the mood we have described; but when he saw Beatrice passing by in all her beauty, he was appeased at once, and turning the affair

into a compliment to her, without, however, sparing his unappreciative audience, he said :—

"It is quite right that owls should be silent when the sun appears; but that instead of hiding themselves, they should fly to meet its beams, is a thing I have never seen before;" and there was a hearty laugh at this heavy joke.

This maiden at sixteen was like a rose opening in all its freshness and fragrance to the first rays of a lovely dewy morning. A long blue dress, confined at the waist by a silver chain which fell to her knees, repeated the colour of her eyes, but was far from rivalling the ethereal azure, the soft and languid brightness of those orbs. The mass of her fair hair, soft and shining as spun gold, only covered by a wreath composed of flowers, alternately of silver and blue, fell in a shower, waving over her neck and shoulders rich and fragrant, down to the border of her flowing robe.

The expression of the damsel's face was a mixed one; there was much natural sweetness and candour; but there was also a slight shade of self-will, a faint tinge of fastidious coyness, which, coupled with soft pride, added a certain charm and fascination to the rare nobility of her countenance.

This vision of beauty advanced into the middle of the hall, having on the one side her father, on the other Ottorino; and a low murmur, a whisper of admiration accompanied her on her way. She saw all faces turned on her, she was deafened by the buzzing of voices, which had recommenced around; she partly heard, and partly guessed the words used by the crowd, and lowering her eyelids timidly, blushed very deeply. But what were her feelings, when the minstrel, bending one knee before her, and raising his hat, proclaimed her in a loud voice, Queen of Beauty and Love! The girl, frightened and confused, and feeling overpowered with bashfulness and shyness, pressed close to her father, and implored him by signs that he would take her away —that he would silence that dreadful man. But the Count del Balzo, who was revelling in his daughter's

triumph, far from listening to her entreaties, made her take her seat at the higher end of the hall, sat down on her right hand, and motioned to Ottorino to place himself on the other side, and after he had responded politely to the kind reception given him by the company assembled, he turned with lordly condescension to the minstrel, and, excusing himself for having interrupted the song by his arrival, begged him to continue.

"I will sing something else," said Tremacoldo; and leaning his head on his hand, he walked slowly twice or thrice up and down the space left in the middle of the hall, whilst his hearers disposed themselves round him; then, raising his head, he began to sing the praises of Beatrice. After having compared the girl to the lily of the valley, to the rose of Jericho, to the cedar of Lebanon —after having placed her above all the beautiful sultanas, the ornaments of the harems of Egypt and Persia, and the noble dames and princesses the most praised in the songs of the provincial troubadours—he likened her to Madonna Laura, for whom the verses of Petrarch were then preparing a fame which, after five centuries, is still green and flourishing as ever; and promised to the Como beauty some songs from the poet of the Lady of Avignon, who, although he was not then more than twenty-five years old, was already celebrated through all Italy as the first of poets. Finally, turning towards the young knight who sat beside the maiden, he praised his race, his manners, his courage, and concluded by saying that the damsel suited him as a gem would a ring.

The minstrel was often interrupted by signs of an admiration so passionate that it could not be controlled, but must find vent in applause, though manifestly unsuitable and troublesome. At the end of the song, when all restraint was taken off the increasing enthusiasm, it appeared that the excitement not only filled the great hall, but also even the other room, whence the squires and attendants had crowded to the door to hear the troubadour.

Ottorino sprang to his feet, and taking from his neck the chain he wore, he presented it with a chivalrous

gesture to the singer, who, after returning thanks for the gift, twisted the chain round his hat, gave a leap in the air, and recommenced playing his lute.

In the meantime, Count Oldrado, catching sight of Garbagnate at the other end of the hall, said to his daughter, "I will return in a moment," and ran towards the advocate, to ask him the hour when the trial would begin. But the girl, who found herself alone, with all eyes fixed on her, rose shyly and timidly from her seat, and approached a window looking on the Piazza, where she hoped to breathe a little more at her ease, and to recover herself in some degree. She was also encouraged by being soon joined by Ottorino, who, among so many strangers, as the friend of her father, the companion of her lost brother, and one with whom she had formerly been on such intimate, and even affectionate terms as a child, became at that trying moment a support, and a kind guardian.

To make matters better, the crowd so much dreaded by the damsel had returned to listen to Tremacoldo, who was beginning another song; so by degrees she felt her tremors vanish. But, however, though the first painful feelings of fright were disappearing, there arose within her another sensation—a sensation of true modesty, a kind of terror at finding herself, for the first time, thus in company with a man who was not her father; so turning frequently in the direction of the Count, who was walking about the hall with Garbagnate, she beckoned to him to return to her; but he, deep in discussion, with his head full of church law, and popes, and decretals, only signed to her with his hand that he was coming, and came none the more for that.

In the meantime, Ottorino began speaking to the young lady with respectful and courteous ease, of the time they had passed together at the Castle of Limonta, when she was still a child. He reminded her of her games, her studies, her pleasures, and the small passions and trials of her childhood—that time when everything appears bright to those who look back upon it. Thus Beatrice began to feel reassured in the society of the

young knight; and the terror which she had felt at first was swallowed up in the agreeable excitement of the conversation. She turned less frequently to watch for her father's return, and when she did look for him it was not with her former uneasy and frightened expression.

As to the youth, a secret feeling of pride made the society he was in extremely agreeable to him. Everyone had admired the maiden; the most distinguished young nobles of the country had coveted a word or a look from her; and he was the only one who she was willing to have near her, and to whom she spoke with confiding ease, as to a friend.

Thus, at the first meeting of Ottorino and Beatrice, after a long term of years, the sense of support she found in his presence and the charm he found in her, contributed largely to increase the fraternal affection they felt for each other, and to create in their hearts the germ of another sort of love, which took the place of the former feeling.

A trumpet gave warning that the ordeal was about to commence. The minstrel ceased his song, and his audience hastened to take their places in the balconies. Count Balzo joined his daughter, who remained standing between Ottorino and her father.

CHAPTER IV.

AT the extreme corner of the façade of the Archbishop's palace, looking towards the mountain, there projected a platform, or, to use the German term, a lobby, which was the place for the judges to sit and pronounce sentence. The eyes of all the people collected at the windows, on the roofs, and in the square, were turned to this point, and fixed on the three individuals who occupied this important position.

"Who are they?" asked Beatrice of her father.

"The judge is sitting in the middle," answered the Count; "of the other two standing up, the one on his right with the silver mace is the advocate of the monastery; the other you know—Garbagnate, the advocate of Limonta."

The trumpet sounded again to enforce silence; and then the advocate of the monastery, turning to the judge, said in a clear voice, which was heard all over the square: "Do you admit that you sit as deputy of the illustrious and magnificent noble, Cressone Crivello, in order to decide the strife between the monastery of San Ambrogio and the men of Limonta?" To which the judge replied solemnly, "I admit it." Then the first speaker continued: "I protest before you that the men of Limonta are serfs of the monastery of San Ambrogio." Garbagnate answered: "And I oppose the prescriptive right of a century to the claim of the plaintiff." The judge then gave sentence as follows: "Both sides have offered to produce witnesses ready to testify to the truth of their assertions; but not being willing to give opportunity for perjury, we, by virtue of the archiepiscopal and royal authority committed to us, have decreed that the contending parties shall have recourse to the judgment of God, by means of the duel with clubs and

shields." Turning then to the advocate of the plaintiff: "Do you acknowledge Ramengo da Casale as the champion of the monastery of San Ambrogio?"—to which he replied: "I do acknowledge it." "And you," he asked Garbagnate; "do you acknowledge Lupo of Limonta as the champion of his countrymen, the Limontese?" "I acknowledge it," he answered.

"Now pay attention," said the Count Oldrado to his daughter.

Each of the two advocates then took up a large and knotty cudgel, and, coming before the judgment seat, exchanged weapons as a sign of mutual acceptance of the challenge.

The champions now came forward on the platform, and were received with loud applause; and after some other formalities (which it would be tedious to describe) had been gone through, they swore in turns that they came to that ordeal, not trusting to any charms or enchantments, but to the sole help of God, of the Virgin, and of that valiant knight, the noble Saint George. After this they retired and took up their position within the lists.

While they were coming down the staircase inside the palace, the crowd in the square kept surging to and fro: those behind pressing forward to get a better view, while those in front tried to push them back, so as to preserve their good places.

"If it were not for the interdict," said the Count to Ottorino, "now would be the time to say mass, which the two champions ought to hear kneeling on the steps of the altar, and the shields and cudgels should be formally blessed. I know all about it, for I have at my fingers' ends the customs of the State of Milan, codified by order of the Mayor Brunagio Porca. Now I want to see how they will get out of it, for without blessing the arms, there can be no trial by the ordeal of God."

"I am told," answered the youthful knight, "that the parish priest will not bless them on any account."

"He is quite right; the church law is clear on

that point; he would incur excommunication were he to do so."

"Well, they must settle it as best they may," replied Ottorino. "I understand nothing about it."

The two champions now appeared in the square, accompanied by the judge, two attendants, and a trumpeter; while seven or eight lancers opened for them a passage through the crowd. The judge taking from the hand of an attendant a shield and a cudgel, gave them to Ramengo, addressing him, with a loud voice and solemn manner, in these formal words: "Receive the shield and the club for the attack, for the maintenance of justice." Then presenting similar weapons to Lupo, he said: "Receive the shield and club of defence, for the maintenance of justice." The two champions then entered the lists. The judge went off to take his seat on a dais, accompanied by two notaries. The witnesses and the assistants took their places; and the duel was about to begin, when several voices were heard crying out: "The arms must be blessed!" The judge then stood up, and said: "But your priests will not bless them." A storm of howls, shrieks, and hisses arose on all sides. "The priest is quite right," exclaimed the country people. "He must be forced to bless them; burn him alive!" cried the soldiers, and all the partisans of the anti-pope, who were on the square and in the houses. "Yes!" "No!" No!" "Yes!" was heard on all sides; and the hubbub became demoniacal.

The judge soon saw that the majority sided with the priest, and felt that he now could not pass the matter over easily, more especially as it was nothing so very extraordinary in those days to see a priest burnt or flayed alive for refusing to say mass, or to perform other sacred functions on account of the interdict. The worthy functionary, as soon as quiet was somewhat restored, called out: "If there is any one here who will bless the arms he shall have a silver mark."

The bystanders looked at each other. Surely the priest of Dervio was there just now; and those of Perledo and Limonta; but now they were no more to be

seen. Where had they gone to? Was there no priest among so many people?

At last there came a voice from the crowd which was heard above all the uproar, "Tremacoldo is here, and he's our man."

A shout of approbation rose at once from all sides, "Send for Tremacoldo!"

The reader has to be informed that Tremacoldo, the minstrel, who had been singing the praises of Beatrice a short time before, was, in fact, a priest, and had been canon of Crescenzago. A holy man take up the trade of a buffoon! What a sad sign of the age! the reader will say. But in those times this kind of scandal was not uncommon. The ecclesiastical law discountenanced such doings; the council of Vienna, the council of Bergamo, held by our Archbishop Cassone della Torre, in the year 1311, many other councils and many papal decrees expressly prohibited priests from exercising the trades of butchers or labourers, from keeping taverns, and how much more from turning mountebanks! Notwithstanding this, if similar scandals are sometimes to be found in more godly times, what could be expected during the interdict, when the transgressors had nothing to lose—no immunities, nor privileges of ecclesiastical tribunals, nor benefices to give up—when, in short, there was nothing to restrain them except their own consciences?

"Let Tremacoldo be sent for; go and fetch the canon," the multitude continued to shout out unanimously.

And at last the minstrel was seen coming from the palace between two helmeted soldiers, who cleared the way for him to enter the lists.

Our old friend the falconer, who, as father of one of the champions, had been conceded a good place close to the barrier, called out to his son Lupo, who was standing in the centre of the lists, waiting for the end of this scene; and having at last caught his attention, he said to him: "Listen to me; take care not to fight with unblessed arms, for you know people have their sus-

picions about that rogue over yonder," pointing to Ramengo, who stood leaning with folded arms against the further barrier.

"Never fear, father," replied his son—"let me alone: my arms have been already blessed this morning by his reverence himself; but keep that dark."

Poor Ambrose felt as if these words had put new life into him.

In the meantime the minstrel turned to the deputy and the spectators: "Look here," he said, "I have been singing all the morning, and I am as thirsty as a fish; I was just going down into the Archbishop's cellars for a good draught of beer, when these gentlemen here carried me off; they want me to act priest, but I vow and protest that if the world were to come to an end, I'll do nothing until I have wetted my throat. Do you understand?"

The deputy beckoned to an attendant, who went into the palace, and soon after came out with a large flask of wine. Tremacoldo poured out a good cup-full, swallowed it down with one gulp, took a long breath, and said: "Well, thirst makes one drink well, but you must give the wine its due share; another draught will do no harm; it makes one know the quality of what one's drinking." He filled anew his cup, and drank this time very slowly, sipping it lovingly down to the smallest drop. He looked from time to time at the wine through the glass, against the light, with gloating eyes, and exclaimed, "What excellent liquor, the very thing to put heart into a man, to bring the colour to his face, and tears to his eyes! Well," he said, when he had come to the end, "I feel better now; bring the vestments, the mass-book, and the holy water."

Some of the soldiers had run into the sacristy, and breaking open the lock of a press, had dragged out the robes and vestments which were there, and had brought them to the minstrel.

He took at once the richest of the copes, and having arrayed himself in it, called out, "Now for the biretta."

"We found none."

"Then my minstrel's cap must do instead; an expedient can always be found."

He then turned to one of the men-at-arms who had followed him within the barriers, and placing his hand on his shoulder, "Look here, my good fellow," he said to him, "turn round; you shall be my acolyte; take this holy-water brush—hold it properly, you awkward booby—do you take it for a cross-bow? There, stand there, and look pretty! I declare I'll get you made canon of Sta. Maria Maggiore at the first vacancy." Then he began to mutter a long rigmarole of senseless gibberish, describing strange ciphers in the air, and making fantastic signs over the shields and sticks which were held before him; and accompanied these gestures from time to time with movements of his head and person, which set the bells tingling all over his body.

He then took the holy-water brush from his sham acolyte, and said, "Give me the holy-water basin."

"We could not find any in the church," replied the soldiers.

"No holy water? Well, we must have the holy wine from the Archbishop's cellar." He made his assistant take off his helmet, poured in the wine left in the flask, soaked the brush in this and sprinkled the weapons with it, giving at the same time a push to the acolyte to make him bend his head and say "Amen," and the man, with a grin on his face, did all that was told him.

"The dregs of the pitcher should be for the benefit of the clerk," said the buffoon, in conclusion, to the soldier; "so drink, my fine fellow." The latter, taking the helmet in both hands, cried out—"To the health of whoever proves the better man in the duel," and gulped down the wine

There were various opinions among the spectators of this extravagant scene. Some held that the benediction, though given by a madman in a mad fashion, must hold good, and were not so much scandalized by the buffoonery they had witnessed as we should have expected; for during the length of time that the interdict had

lasted, they had seen and heard so much that was unusual, and even horrible, that this might almost pass for an innocent jest. There were others who thought that Tremalcoldo had converted the ceremony into a farce in order to escape from the danger of giving a benediction under the interdict, and others again who, without going deeper, laughed heartily at the scurrilous proceedings of the minstrel: so that in the end there were few left to find fault with him.

The champions now took up their respective stations, opposite to each other, at the two extremities of the lists. They were dressed in leggings of chamois leather fastened round their waists, which reached to their feet, and ended in a pair of red sandals; all the rest of the body was bare. On the left arm they bore a wooden target squared at each end, slightly curved on the inner side, and covered with parchment: and in the right hand a large and knotty oaken cudgel.

Ramengo da Casale appeared to be about thirty-five or thereabouts; he was thick-set, strong-limbed, wide-chested, and broad-shouldered; he had a bull's neck, short, brawny arms, and shaggy red hair.

Lupo had better-proportioned limbs, was taller by half a head, handsomer and more agile than his opponent, but he was far from exhibiting the strength of that other herculean form.

The multitude were again silent; those farthest removed from the scene of action were standing on benches and tables; the windows and roofs all round were crammed with people. All eyes were fixed on the two champions, all hearts were beating, and it might easily be seen that the general feeling was in favour of Lupo, partly because of the justice of his cause, and partly because the first sight of his pleasing exterior and open countenance roused universal sympathy.

The Limontese youth, who was placed with his back to the church, turned to look at the Archbishop's palace, and seeing the Count, Ottorino, and Beatrice, he saluted them with a slight inclination of his head, then lowering his eyes, turned them for an instant on his father, who

was standing behind him, as much as to say, "Trust to me, and do not fear."

The trumpet gave the last signal, and the two champions advanced towards each other with a measured and cautious step, covering their heads with the shields, and skilfully whirling the sticks round their heads.

When they had arrived in the centre of the lists, and were almost within reach of each other, Ramengo planted his brawny legs firmly on the ground, and resting somewhat obliquely on his right thigh, stood ready to meet the attack.

Lupo began circling round him and trying to draw him on by repeated feints, but his experienced adversary, whose plan of the battle was to allow the first fire of the raw and eager boy (as he considered him) to be used up, contented himself with keeping his front turned towards his adversary, and in so doing kept a circle, of which his right foot marked the circumference and his left remained as the axis. And so this valiant duellist continued, quietly parrying all his opponent's blows with admirable science and peculiar skill. Once, however, when Lupo, in making a thrust, left one side exposed, he seized the opportunity, and dealt him such a back stroke as would have broken the youth's ribs, if he had not been as quick as lightning in springing out of the way. The cudgel grazed his skin, and turned off harmlessly with a whizz that found an echo in the heart of poor Ambrose, who turned as pale as death.

Those among the crowd who sided with Lupo thought matters began to look serious, and became somewhat apprehensive for their favourite. But he, stimulated by his own danger, and burning with shame, returned to the charge with such impetuosity that Ramengo was forced to beat a retreat, and in defending himself was not able to maintain the same calm superiority as before. The storm of blows was too rapid, and the fury with which the young henchman fell upon him was too overwhelming. The champion of the monastery was, however, skilful enough to profit by a false move on his adversary's part, and contrived to deal a blow which

broke the shield in half. Lupo felt his hand stiffen, and became aware of what damage had been done by seeing the broken target entangled on his arm. He opened his fist, threw off the straps, and casting on the ground the useless instrument of defence, seized the cudgel in desperation with both hands, raised it on high above his head, and with all the strength he could muster, aimed a fearful blow at the head of his opponent. Ramengo was in perfect readiness to protect with his shield the threatened part; but the solid mass came down so furiously and with such power that the shield itself was knocked down on his skull, and he was entirely stunned. He felt a buzzing in his ears, his eyes swam, his knees gave way under him, he tottered for a moment, and then fell down senseless to the ground, as if dead. But whether it was from a natural instinct to defend his face, or a movement made by chance, he lowered first his left elbow, and then sank down on it, so that his head rested on the target and did not touch the arena. Lupo's father had done nothing all this time but follow his son's movements, straining his eyes, and showing by every movement the intense anxiety of his mind. Sometimes he drew his head in between his shoulders, and shrank and twisted and made himself as small as he could, as if to shelter himself from a blow directed towards him; and sometimes, planting his feet on the ground, and pressing with all his might against the barrier on which he was leaning, he raised himself as high as he could, so as to give more vigour to a blow which his son was aiming at his adversary. When at last he saw Ramengo sink down on the ground, he raised his eyes to heaven, and felt his senses reel.

At this moment there burst forth a cry like a clap of thunder, and the father was quite beside himself at the bursts of applause showered down on his son.

"Long live Lupo! long live the falconer's son. Hurrah for the Limontese!" exclaimed the whole multitude.

But the advocate Garbagnate, who, before the fight

had begun, had re-entered the grand hall, asked Ottorino at this juncture whether he thought Ramengo was dead. "Dead! not a bit of it," he replied. "It is true that blood is flowing from his nose and ears, but there is nothing in that. He is only stunned, and it will soon pass off."

"Then we must tell Lupo to place his head on the bare ground, or else they will get out of it by some quibble, and say that it is a drawn battle. It must be remembered that our statutes do not recognize a man as conqueror in this kind of ordeal, unless he makes his adversary's head touch the ground, or drives him out of the lists."

The Count del Balzo heard Garbagnate give this information, and partly because he wished the Limontese to benefit by the victory gained by their champion, and partly from the mania he always had of passing for a very knowing fellow, he called out to Lupo to do as Garbagnate suggested. But hardly had the congratulations of the bystanders ceased to sound in his ear, than he perceived that he had made a great blunder, by having been led into an action that might compromise him with the Abbot. He began, therefore, bitterly to repent of having done so, and atoned for his petty vanity by a well-founded apprehension of the consequences.

Lupo, before the combat, had been instructed privately by Garbagnate as to what he would have to do in order to acquit himself with honour; but not being accustomed to the snares and quibbles of lawyers, had thought, when he saw Ramengo stretched on the ground, that there could be no further difficulty, and so, when he heard the Count advise him to "make his head touch the ground," he said to himself, "But here he is lying as stiff as a corpse. What can they want more?" The idea then came into his mind, in order to set all doubts at rest, to put his adversary outside the arena; so bending over him to see if he could detect any signs of life, he seized him round the waist, hoisted him on to his shoulders, and ran round the lists with him. Then,

stopping near the barrier, and beckoning to those about to retire a little, with one great effort he flung the wretched man like a sack of grain over the palisade, and sent him spinning among the soldiers and spectators.

The crowd, after clapping their hands, and crying out, "Hurrah for Limonta! Hurrah for Lupo!" began now to separate, and disperse to their several homes through the nearest streets.

In the meantime the gentry gathered again round Tremacoldo, who had again resumed his character of minstrel. After pressing entreaties, he recommenced singing the "Rondinella," which had been interrupted by the arrival of Count del Balzo, a song which was the fashion at that time on the lake of Como, and was said to have been composed by a princess who had been confined in the Castle of Rezzonico to die of starvation, on account of the brutal jealousy of her husband.

We propose to lay this song before our readers later on, when the minstrel will sing it again, but on a more serious occasion.

When the lay was finished, the Count del Balzo went away with Beatrice, who was much affected by it; most of the knights and ladies followed their example, and but few remained.

"Listen to me, Tremacoldo," said one of those few; "let us hear the verses which you made when you fell among the thieves, who wanted to make mince-meat of you."

"And they did it pretty effectually," answered Tremacoldo: "they had already scattered to the winds my little all, and I thought myself well off to have my head left on my shoulders."

"And how did you manage it?"

"Because a fancy took these worthies to hear me sing."

"And you humoured them?"

"What would you have had me do? I luckily hit upon a song which saved my skin, and got me besides four gold pieces"

"Come, now, let us have it."

"Shall I sing it as I did then?"

"Certainly, begin!"

"Here it is, then," and tuning his voice to the instrument, he began:—

If e'er thy suit might win the ear
Of fairest nymph, and favoured be;
If e'er from death or prison drear
St. Nicholas deliver thee;
The Minstrel's lute to touch forbear,
His scrip and wallet be thy care.

No roof above his head, no home,
A wanderer and destitute;
From house to house his lot to roam,
With wallet still and plaintive lute:
The Minstrel's lute to touch forbear,
His scrip and wallet be thy care.

How oft within the forest shade,
Ere Philomel awoke the day,
His wallet 'neath his weary head,
Still sleeping, with his lute, he lay:
The Minstrel's lute to touch forbear,
His scrip and wallet be thy care.

His wallet still his lowly seat,
He strikes his soft recording lute;
The beasts he lures from wild retreat,
The guests within the court sit mute:
The Minstrel's lute to touch forbear,
His scrip and wallet be thy care.

Unhurt, Judæa's plains among,
Or while he climbs the mountain track,
His lute about his neck still hung,
His faithful wallet at his back:
The Minstrel's lute to touch forbear,
His scrip and wallet be thy care.

A pilgrim weary, sad, alone,
'Tis his that holy tomb to greet,
To pay his vow and kiss the stone,
With wallet meet, and lute-strings sweet:
The Minstrel's lute to touch forbear,
His scrip and wallet be thy care.

If e'er thy suit might win the ear
  Of fairest nymph, and favoured be;
If e'er from death or prison drear
  St. Nicholas deliver thee;
The Minstrel's lute to touch forbear,
  His scrip and wallet be thy care.

CHAPTER V.

THE people who had gathered together at Bellano from all the lake districts were now on their way to their own homes. On the shore, within the harbour, there was a great uproar going on—talking and shouts, and a rattling of chains, which were being unfastened from the rings to loosen the boats, and questioning, and answers, and an exchange of news and greetings. Here you might see a bark full of people strike off from the shore into the deep water; there the boatmen, with their oars already dipped in the lake, on the move, are hurrying some loiterer who is delaying them.

On one side is an individual, who, with angry imprecations, is endeavouring to clear some space to get his boat free from larger vessels between which it is stuck; on the other the boats are sailing swiftly from the shore. In a very short time the lake was covered with barks of every description, which, according to their several destinations, either hoisted their sails to prepare for a strong wind, which had set in a short time before, or else put all their strength into rowing against the waves, which broke with a foaming noise against the bounding prow.

The Limonta party were the last to start: there were six barks, and wishing to keep together, they were waiting till Lupo was released from the hands of the deputy and the advocates, who had kept him back to go through some formalities.

The Count del Balzo, in the most courteous manner possible, had insisted on Ottorino returning with him to the castle to spend some days, so they entered a vessel together, and took their seats in one of those miniature houses, prettily ornamented and furnished with every comfort, which were placed at that time, and

are even so to this day, in the centre of the boats belonging to grandees. Beatrice sat down opposite her father, and the priest of Limonta was invited by the Count to take his place opposite the young knight.

There were two oars in the stern and two in the bow. Michael, as the eldest, took charge of the helm. His son, Arigozzo, was on the front bench, the place usually given to the strongest and most skilful oarsman.

Our Lupo, after having received with a certain unpolished modesty the congratulations showered on him by the nobles, came out on the prow, and placed himself astride on the point of the vessel, with his legs dangling on either side, amusing himself with dipping his feet in the water at every pitch of the boat, and feeling his face sprinkled with the spray of the oars. He sat with his arms folded, gazing on the mountains from which he had been away so long, and contemplating with an inexpressible affection those peaks and mountain slopes, and those winding valleys, those stern and beetling precipices,—all places full of the memories of his childhood, and which were to him like the face of a well-known friend.

Ambrose, his father, was sitting in the bottom of the boat, thinking of his own happiness in possessing such a son, whom, in his opinion, every gentleman would be proud to have for his own. From time to time he approached him, and whispered a few tender words to him, to which demonstrations Lupo would respond by a glance or a smile.

When they were at the point of Morcate, Arigozzo, seeing a small bright cloud over Val Menaggio, said, "There is going to be a storm. Make haste, my brave boys; pull a few strong strokes, that we may get to Varenna before it comes upon us!" and the four oars pulled more evenly together, and with a quicker stroke.

But in the covered part of the boat, after they had chatted a little over the events of the day, the father of Beatrice turned the conversation upon Marco Visconti, and related to his young guest something that he already partly knew, and which the Count was in the

habit of telling everyone, namely, how he had been at school with that famous captain. "We studied together," said he, "the trivio and the quarivio, and later on Law and Equity—and Marco was one of the ablest scholars—and, to tell you the truth, there was only one other that could at all equal him"—and here he gave a little smile of mock modesty, and showed clearly who the one was he did not name. But fearing, however, that Ottorino would not have acumen enough to interpret his reticence, "We were always rivals," he continued, "and I remember the dispute we had together when the book called 'De Monarchia,' of Dante Alighieri, came out—a poisonous book, afterwards burnt, as it deserved, by the common hangman—and Marco, who was mad about the Ghibelline Faction, would defend it tooth and nail. I can tell you we made noise enough about it, but yet remained always good friends."

"Yes, I know that, for he has often spoken of you to me in former times," answered Ottorino.

"Do you mean that?" asked the Count, anxiously; "and what did he say?"

"Knowing that I was so intimate with your poor Lionel, he asked me all about you and the Countess, whom he praised to the skies."

Count Oldrado in a low voice whispered in the knight's ear, so as not to be heard by his daughter; but notwithstanding, he spoke so loud that Beatrice, though not appearing or intending to listen, did not lose a syllable of his discourse.

"You must know," he said, "that Ermelinda was at one time to have been Marco's wife, but strange events happened. Stop, I will tell you about it at a more convenient season; there was much ill blood over it, and they even came to blows, my wife's father having been slain by Marco at the fords of the Adda."

At this moment the conversation was interrupted by a sudden clap of thunder. A second after the steersman was heard crying out: "The Menagino is upon us, all hands to work!"

There was now an agitation produced in the boat by the movements of Lupo and Ambrogio in obedience to this order, succeeded by a short silence, during which could be heard the distant roar of the storm over the lake, which seemed to come nearer every moment. The priest opened a window and looked out. It looked very black towards Menaggio, and already the first ominous dash of the white-crested waves was heard on the shore, a sure harbinger of the coming storm. The Count, approaching the door near the stern, called out: "Michael, why did you not bear up for the shore at the first sign of bad weather? Now we shall be driven among those atrocious rocks, where there is no landing!"

"It has come as suddenly as if the devil had brought it," replied the boatman. "Courage, men!" he cried out. "On, my brave boys—now close all together!"

The men set to work with a will, and plied their oars so vigorously that the timbers of the boat quite cracked at each stalwart stroke. But now they began to feel the squall, now the first waves began to strike the vessel, which no longer preserved its equilibrium, but pitched and tossed in all directions, neutralizing to a great extent the frantic efforts of the boatmen.

In spite of it all, however, the vessel continued to make way by degrees, and was fast approaching the point of Varenna.

They were already abreast of the promontory, and were about to double it, when a sudden gust struck the stern of the boat, and a sound as of splitting wood was heard, followed by appalling shouts, "The rudder is gone. We are lost! Belay that awning! Holy Virgin! Rig an oar in the steerage! Quick, tie it down! Lord have mercy upon us! Help, help!"

Everything in the boat was in a state of wild confusion, amid these loud cries of anguish and despair, which were, however, almost drowned by the whistling of the wind, the roar of the breakers, and the terrible detonations of the thunder, echoing from the cliffs and caverns of the mountains overhead.

The priest clasped his hands in prayer, administered

to them all absolution *in articulo mortis*, and then fell on his knees in a corner of the little cabin ; while the Count, with stony eyes and open mouth, stared wildly at his daughter, who was clinging to him, and cried out every moment, " Lord help me ! "

Ottorino had rushed out of the cabin, to render what help he could ; but he soon saw that the vessel, which was now entirely at the mercy of the winds and waves, was in imminent peril of shipwreck on the cliffs of Morcate, in spite of the almost superhuman exertions of the rowers to avoid the rocks immediately ahead. Just as he came out, Arigozzo, who had thrown the whole weight of his body on to his oar, suddenly missed his stroke, and losing his balance from the non-resistance of the water, fell straight into the lake. He struggled a moment or two with the billows, when the boat passed over him, and he appeared no more.

" Make for the mountain ! " cried the steersman in despair, who, owing to his view being obstructed by the cabin amidships, was ignorant of the loss of his son.

A few more mingled prayers and curses were still heard, but directly afterwards all sounds were lost in one general inarticulate shriek, as the boat was violently driven by a huge wave upon a mass of perpendicular rock.

At this crisis the young soldier did not lose his presence of mind, but fixing his eye on a small rock close at hand, he gathered himself up for a leap, and sprang on it, holding the chain of the boat in one hand ; but the retreating wave forced back the vessel, and would have dragged him also from his vantage ground, had he not clung tightly to the rock on which he was. The next wave sent the boat back again to the rock, and Ottorino this time managed to grasp the taffrail. Lupo, the falconer, and the other boatmen, who were standing ready at the prow, at once leapt out, and luckily contrived to pass the chain round a wild fig-tree, growing in a crevice. The vessel, thus fastened against the cliffs with the bows high out of the water,

like a bull taken in a lasso, appeared to kick and struggle against the repeated assaults of the billows, which, however, failed to effect their object.

Ottorino and the rest of the party, after they had seen Count Balzo and his daughter safe out of the boat, began searching all over the mass of rocks for traces of the man who had gone overboard, but without much hope of success. His father alone, who had been the last to leave the boat, and in the confusion had not perceived that his son was missing, sat down at the foot of the rock, with a piece of broken oar on his knee, and began to look for him among the others, but without much uneasiness, as he felt sure that everyone was safe.

Just then the Count, relieved from his past alarm, and much annoyed by the perils he had gone through, began to upbraid the steersman and his son Arigozzo, whose fate also he was far from suspecting. Michael received these reproaches with downcast eyes, and the general air of a man conscious of having deserved them; but on hearing his son's name (his most sensitive point), coupled with his own, he could not restrain himself from answering in some measure. But suddenly turning towards the lake, his eye was caught by something strange, apparently entangled in the clefts of a rock close by, and almost hidden by the waves. On looking more closely he distinguished the corner of a brown gabardine, and then a hand that now and again appeared above the waves.

The poor father felt ready to drop; seizing his broken oar, he leapt to his feet, and cried out in an agonized voice, "Arigozzo, Arigozzo!" There being no reply, he rushed up the rock, and looked round amongst the men, but his son was not there. His eyes now fell on the Count, who had just before insulted that much-loved name. "You are there, are you, you dog?" he roared out, and brandishing the broken oar, darted forward to strike at him.

On hearing Beatrice's shriek, Ottorino stepped forward and parried the blow, and the next moment Lupo

and the rest rushed up and disarmed the frenzied man, who struck his brow with his clenched fist, and sprang into the lake.

Here he could be seen struggling with the infuriated waves, with the ardour and strength of despair. In a few strokes he reached the body, and groping in the water, caught it firmly by the hair; but overcome by a thrill of paternal affection, he felt that this was too rough a mode of handling the beloved form. So he placed his left hand under the chin, so as to support the head, while with his right he paddled through the water towards the rock he had just quitted. The boatmen came up in their vessel, now almost in a sinking condition, and threw the old man the ropes of the sail, by grasping which he managed to get safely to land with his melancholy and precious burden.

He then laid out his son's body on the rock, with the head on his own knees, and, bending over it, examined the chest to see if the heart still beat; then pressing his own breast and cheeks against those of his son, he covered his eyes, mouth, and face with kisses, breathing upon him as if hoping to restore him to life. A sudden gust of wind slightly moved the arm of the corpse, which was hanging down, and made it stir a little. At this the poor father was seized with a sudden thrill of hope; the blood rushed to his cheeks for an instant; his features seemed relieved, and a sudden gleam of light flashed from his eyes, which he kept intently fixed on the beloved countenance; but, at last, realizing the deception, he clutched his hair with both hands, and then stretched out his fists towards the lake: "Oh, ye accursed wind and waves!" he cried, "and thou thrice cursed carcase of a bark, and the hour I first put foot into thee! Perdition take ye all!" All the rest stood round gazing at him, like men bereft of their senses; none dared offer him a word of consolation. But the priest, after leaving him a short time to his grief, came near him, and instead of addressing his words to Michael himself, placed one hand on the head of his son, which was still on the father's knee, and said, with a feeling

voice: "My poor Arigozzo! thou wast ever a good, God-fearing son, and so fond of thy parents!"

"That is true, that is true!" answered the father, deeply affected by the praise given to his loved one. "I did not deserve so good a son."

"In these times when one's faith is in such peril," continued the priest, "how dost thou know, my poor Michael, that the Lord may not have called him in mercy, whilst he was still His? Come, think that thou art restoring him to Him who gave him thee, and who has taken him away, for ends we cannot know, but which are, without doubt, ordained in justice, and compassion for his elect?"

"Oh! but what in the world can I do without him?" exclaimed the boatman. "What shall I reply to my poor Martha when I get home, and she asks me, 'What hast thou done with our son?'"

"The Lord will not forsake you," gently urged the good priest. "He who has sent the affliction will give you strength to bear it."

Michael raised his eyes to heaven, and a moment afterwards exclaimed: "Why am not I dead? Why leave me here a useless old man, and take him away in the first bloom of youth—our only hope, support, and consolation?" but he could not go on.

After his tears had somewhat assuaged his grief, he turned to the priest and said: "Oh, what a son, what a son I have lost! How he loved me!—and so well-behaved—a son whose good sense and judgment surpassed all others in Limonta; and his poor mother was always telling me that, old as I am, I might take pattern from him."

Meantime the others who had been saved were discussing how best to get away from that naked rock before nightfall. Although the point upon which they had struck was at a little distance from the mountain, and appeared to have been separated from it for many ages, still it was no great difficulty to reach the foot of the mountain by leaping from one to another of the smaller rocks that showed above the waves. But even when you had got to the mountain you might say you

had done nothing, as it rose to an incalculable height, as steep as a wall.

They waited here awhile, scanning the neighbouring heights to see if they could find some shepherd passing near them in search of a stray lamb or kid, so that they might inform him of their extremity by signs, and ask his assistance; but wherever they looked not a living soul could be seen. As to making their voices heard in that vast solitude, beneath that illimitable sky and amidst the noise of the waves, that was evidently hopeless.

At last, after much hesitation amongst themselves, Lupo said to his companions, "We must resolve to act while the daylight lasts. I will try to get up there"—pointing with his finger to a peak a little to the right—"and once there I shall easily contrive to drop down to Varenna, and return here from thence in a boat."

The falconer would not hear of his running so tremendous a risk. "Stay here with us," he said. "We must take our chance alike." Ottorino, too, tried to dissuade him from the enterprise, which seemed the height of rashness, not to say downright madness; but he replied, "I have often followed the chase as a youth, and I can fairly say that there is not a precipice from Codano to Legnone that I do not know, so let me try my luck, and, with God's help, I hope to succeed." He then took off his sandals, laid down the short cloak which he wore, and, clad in a tight jerkin made of thin leather, at once set to work.

He reached the foot of the mountain without much difficulty, and stopping for a moment at the last rock that stood against it, looked up at the tremendous height he had to surmount, put his hands on the rock to try it, and then shook his head, as if he despaired of being able to keep his footing. At last, however, he crossed himself, and began to ascend slowly and circumspectly, creeping and clambering from cliff to cliff, from rock to rock, and from precipice to precipice. If he came across a bramble, a sapling, or a young oak, or a thin stem of wild fig, he clutched it with his hands, and then supported his feet against it, and so got higher and

higher. Every cleft and crevice were made the most of by the joint action of his arms, legs, fingers, and nails—now crawling on his knees, now creeping on his chest, and so on as he best could.

The people on the rocks below followed his movements with their eyes, trembling at every uncertain step or slip that he made, especially when, by the glare of the lightning, they saw him now about half way up, hanging on by those frightfully precipitous masses of rock, amongst which the thunder roared, and immediately above the resounding waves below; and up above his head they could see another height, more steep and more desperate-looking than any of the former ones.

By good luck, however, the climber lighted upon a cavity where he could rest and take breath for a moment; thence he cast down his eyes to judge of the distance he had already traversed, but soon drew them back, quite dazed and giddy, owing to the tremendous height; but in a few minutes he crossed himself again, and started afresh. As he kept climbing up the precipice hand over hand, and gradually gaining ground, he looked smaller and smaller, and sometimes could scarcely be distinguished from the rock itself, at one time looking like a bush moving in the wind, at another like a falcon hovering round the precipices in search of its quarry.

The lookers-on lost sight of him for a moment, and then, discerning something rolling down from the top of the precipice, they gave up all for lost; but they soon saw that it was only a mass of rock, bounding from peak to peak, till it fell into the lake broken into a thousand fragments. The daring traveller once more turned round, looking like a brown, dim speck, and then disappeared altogether.

Ottorino then asked one of the boatmen if any vessel could live in such a sea.

"That's as it may be," was the reply. "It would take a bold man to launch out three hands'-breadths from the shore at this moment; but the wind must go down at sunset, and by the time Lupo arrives at Varenna the waves may go down as well."

The young knight said no more, but sat down on the rock by the side of Beatrice. All kept their eyes fixed on the mountains of Tremazzo, behind which the sun had just gone down. Gigantic clouds, hurried on by the wind, seemed to be whirled and twisted about and changed into a thousand fantastic forms, tinged with a fiery red. The light, as it disappeared behind the mountains, fled from the face of the different objects, which from one moment to another, beginning at the most distant ones, and thence advancing by degrees, appeared to grow fainter and more misty, until as they lost their outline and took all sorts of uncertain forms, they vacillated, so to speak, before the eye, and at last vanished altogether.

In the immediate vicinity of the sunset the sky was still red, but if you cast your eyes from the highest peaks down the mountain slopes to the verge of the lake, neither trees nor houses could be distinguished. Valleys and eminences looked alike; the whole mountain range seemed one uniform gigantic shadow standing up against the sky, and even that shadow soon grew confused and uncertain, and at last was completely blotted out. The darkness became more intense every moment, and the shipwrecked party at last were scarcely able to see one another. On the fluctuating surface of the lake, however, dark as it was, they could discern at a certain distance the furious billows, with threatening white crests, tumbling over and over and pursuing each other in turn, till they lashed against the rock, as if intending to swallow it up, and recover the prey that had been wrested from them.

All was quiet above; but from below, above the roaring of the waves and the wind, might be heard the low, monotonous, and continued wail of poor Michael repeating his rosary over the body of his son.

Ottorino had taken the hand of Beatrice, which in her fright and bewilderment she had abandoned to him, quite thankful to feel herself near a protector; for, as her father was sitting crouched up on the other side of the rock, with his head between his knees and his teeth

chattering with cold and terror, she could not trust much to him. The long hair of the girl floating in the wind was carried for an instant against the young man's face, who, shipwrecked as he was, even in that place and amidst that scene of terror and pity, would not have exchanged that moment for a whole life of prosperity.

After about an hour, which seemed an eternity to all but him and poor Michael, who had no power to calculate time, both being totally absorbed in the idea of the present—but, alas! in how different a manner—a light was seen towards the point of Varenna, which they had been unable to weather; and they set up a general cry of joy, which was responded to by other shouts, half drowned by the wind. The shipwrecked people continued shouting, which served as a guide for the rescuing vessel to steer for, in its troublous course. Already for some time, over and above the noise of the waves, an intermittent noise as of oars had been heard, which increased as it came nearer, and then the sound of voices in conversation, and at last the vessel itself appeared. The Count's two boatmen ran down to lend a hand in preventing the boat from striking against the rock, with whose assistance Lupo, who was with the new-comers, managed to fix outside the bows a large platform, to serve as a bridge between the vessel and the rock.

The first to sally forth, as soon as he saw it firmly fixed, was Count Oldrado; he jumped into the vessel, and turning round to call his daughter, soon had the satisfaction of seeing her by his side, as Ottorino had taken her arm and assisted her to cross. At last they all got on board one by one; the old pilot was the last, who laid his son's corpse under the covered part of the stern, and prepared to lie down by the side of it. After a while Lupo, seeing that he was quite wet through and numbed with cold, having nothing on but a doublet, took off his own cloak and spread it over him. Michael neither accepted nor refused this act of kindness; at first he seemed not to perceive it all, but when, on

moving his arm, he felt the unaccustomed incumbrance, he rose upon his knees, took it off his back, and throwing it over his son's body, spread it and smoothed it out with the tenderest affection.

Once round the point, they saw the mole of Varenna glistening with lights, and heard the voices of the people with whom it was crowded; the vessel came close to the shore, and following the advice freely offered from thence, with a sudden turn of the bows, got into the entrance of the harbour in safety. The country people then busied themselves about the men who had been rescued. One drew up the boat into a place of safety, another showed a light, or helped the men to get on shore; all tried who could show the most kindness; but with all this display of affection in action, they could not forbear from rallying the Limonta boatmen for allowing themselves to be caught in a squall so carelessly. The latter kept silence for a while, but at last began to retort again, and the wordy contest was speedily turning into a free fight, when a voice was heard in the crowd saying that the Count's pilot was in the boat with the corpse of his son, who was drowned. In a moment the shouts and invectives were hushed, and changed into a general murmur of compassion. All sorts of assistance and services were proffered to the poor father, who, however, refused everything, preferring to remain all night on guard over the corpse, which they proposed to transport to Limonta in the morning.

As soon as it was day, the father went in search of a carpenter to make a cross to be placed on the rock where the wreck had taken place; and taking from his pocket a few coins that were in it, he dropped them one by one into his horny palm to count them, saying, "This money was earned by him—it is some he gave me the other day, on his return from Lecco. Who would then have said that it would have served to pay for his memorial cross?"

When the wind fell the night before there had arrived at Varenna other vessels from Limonta, and amongst them the one belonging to Michael himself, which he had lent to some of his fellow-townsmen. In the morn-

ing some pious hands laid in it the corpse of the drowned man. When the poor father reached the shore, and saw his bark and the burden they had laid upon it, his eyes filled with tears, but making a strong effort, he got on board calmly, and taking up one of the oars, put it against the shore and pushed off; then he began to row the boat with both oars slowly away from the shore.

The lake was quite calm, and bright as a mirror. Some little fish might be seen from time to time to leap from the clear water like a flash of silvery light, and then fall back again, leaving a circular curl on the smooth and placid surface.

The sky was a brilliant azure colour, and the air clear and soft. Every cottage, house, and little church, as well on the high mountain ranges as on the slopes that came down to the water's edge, stood clearly out to the view. The fresh and dewy verdure of the plants, brambles, and bushes, received continually a new and splendid colouring from the rays of the rising sun, and from the manifold vagaries of the light, now broken by giant vaporous shadows, now diminishing and dying away in all sorts of indescribable combinations.

This spectacle of joy and peace was only too sharp a contrast to the anguish and mental agitation of the unfortunate boatman, who went rowing on for some time in silence, though growing sadder every moment, till at last, in a frenzy of rage and grief, he struck the water with all his might with the oar he held in his right hand, exclaiming "Thou treacherous lake!" when the oar broke, and pulling the other awkwardly into the boat, with the stump of the first still remaining in his hand, he struck such a blow on the gunwale that he broke one of the rowlocks.

But whilst he was going on in this way, he made the vessel give such a lurch that it displaced a third oar that was lying on a bench, which slipped down and all but fell upon his son's body. This frightened Michael, who leaped forward, seized the oar as it was falling, and holding it in his hands for a moment, looked at it, and said, "It is his," and then gently replaced it

"O Lord!" he then exclaimed, "help me, and have me in Thy holy keeping, lest Satan tempt me to kill myself in despair, and lose my soul," and then returned to his rowing, fervently repeating his devotions.

Thus he prayed, ever urging the boat forward, bending alternately backwards and forwards to the oars; and whilst his lips murmured the accustomed words, the unhappy man ran over in his mind all the stages of his dead son's life—first as a baby, then a child, then a boy, then as a grown-up young man, down to that last fatal day. He called to mind the first imperfect utterances; words that had made him feel all the charms of paternity: all the fond hopes he had conceived of him, which were so well justified by his advancing years. There recurred to his memory, too, all the past hopes of the support and repose which were to soothe his declining years; nor could he forget the mother's comfort and delight when she saw him guide his little bark to land, after his first voyage, having spent the night in an agony of terror, listening to the wind whistling through the chestnut-trees, and ever and anon looking out of window at the lake, and asking, "Where can my Arigozzo be now?"

Then he remembered how his son, who was one of the best oarsmen on the lake, used to boast that there was no one who could beat him in sailing or steering; and he seemed to hear from the shore the plash of his vigorous oar, and the tune of his favourite song, with which he was wont to while away the tedious hours while drifting alone about the lake in a calm.

Whilst these thoughts were passing through the poor father's mind, his lips continued to articulate the words of his prayer, which seemed to issue forth as involuntarily as the babblings of a running stream. Every now and then he would suddenly break off in the midst of a petition to hum his Arigozzo's favourite air: and then, again, as if roused by the fresh sounds striking his ear, he shook his head, and you could see that his face was covered with tears, as he raised it heavenwards.

Meanwhile, the vessel drew near to Limonta, and now

a fresh and more intense affliction, at the sight of the well-known localities, obscured the mind of the bereft father and the wretched husband. For as he approached the shore, he saw it covered with a crowd of people looking towards him, and apparently waiting for him; and in the midst of them was a woman tearing her hoary and dishevelled locks, and beating her breast wildly, whilst the shore and the mountains re-echoed her incoherent and despairing shrieks.

We will not, however, harrow our readers' feelings by detaining them any longer over the spectacle of such poignant grief; so leaving, for the present, the wretched boatman, and, if that were possible, his still more wretched wife, we will return to our other friends, whom we left at Varenna.

CHAPTER VI.

THAT night the whole party were taken in by the parish priest, who could scarcely realize that he had such distinguished guests under his poor roof, and boasted of it for long afterwards.

Here, that is to say at Varenna, Pelagrua was still to be found in a sad plight, without any protector or money or connections of any kind, with the prospect before him of soon having to leave the district where he had made himself so odious, and could find no one to say a good word for him. The poor wretch came in the morning quite humiliated—at least, outwardly so—to the priest of Limonta, begging him with many piteous entreaties to forgive him, out of charity, all the mischief he had done in the past, and the greater mischief he had desired to do him, and to help him how to find some remedy for his case, which was well-nigh desperate.

The good priest had compassion not so much for the man himself—who would have been none the worse for a little punishment—but for his innocent wife and child, and, therefore, promised to plead his cause with Count del Balzo, though, to say the truth, he did not hope much from that quarter. But, luckily for the unfortunate wretch, when the priest joined the Count he found him with his daughter and Ottorino. The maiden, naturally kind and pitiful, had seen Pelagrua's wife on the occasion of her taking refuge in the castle, and had shared with her mother in the sympathy inspired by that poor woman's troubles. So now she was much moved by the priest's appeal, and made a great point with her father that he should provide an asylum for the miserable family.

These entreaties were not very acceptable to the Count, who wished for nothing less than to risk breaking alto-

gether with the Abbot of San Ambrogio, and especially in a concern which was likely to make him highly unpopular with all the people of Limonta.

The poor man, however, was unwilling to deny his daughter openly, and, therefore, busied himself in inventing excuses and pretences, hesitated, and twisted himself about as if sitting upon thorns; but Ottorino, too happy to be able to please the young lady, and to find favour with her father, offered to take in Pelagrua himself, and, the affair being now regarded as settled, he received from Beatrice, by way of thanks, a look of such heartfelt gratitude that the young man felt the charm of it thrill through his soul.

The priest of Limonta, taking the young man aside, thought it his duty to warn him as to the character of the man to whom he was about to do such a favour, feeling sure that such information ought to put him on his guard; but he did not listen with much attention to these admonitions, partly from the natural carelessness of his age, and partly because he could not endure that anyone who was, as it were, sanctified by the compassion of Beatrice, should remain in distress. He decided, not perceiving any better course, to send his *protégé* to Marco Visconti, who, for his sake, would, he was sure, place the man in one of his numerous castles. He accordingly sent for the necessary implements to write a letter to Marco, but—who would believe it?—in all that district there could not be found an inkstand, a pen, or a piece of parchment for their weight in gold! The priest did not trouble himself with writing; the apothecary and the few local gentry had no idea how to use a pen. And this was not a peculiarity of the priest, the doctor, and the gentry of Varenna: it was the same story everywhere, and not only on the Lake of Como, but in all the country, in all Italy, in all Europe; and it was but natural. In a century when nothing was thought of but swords and lances and crossbows, fortresses and castles and battle-fields, how could literature flourish—a tender, sensitive plant, which loves shade and solitude, and cannot stand being contemned and trampled upon?

To cut matters short, the falconer bethought himself of an old notary who used to inhabit Perledo, a small village on the mountain, on the skirts of which was situated Varenna, so he hastened up there and returned with all that was needed, though it must be owned they had some difficulty in diluting the ink, which had been dried up for more than a year.

In the letter which Ottorino wrote about Pelagrua, he was obliged to explain why and how it was he had become concerned in this man's affairs; he therefore narrated all that had happened to himself, from his squire's combat down to that present time. He spoke of the Count del Balzo, in whose castle he was about to pass some days, and then he touched on Beatrice, who was still uppermost in his mind, and dwelt on her more than was quite wise, if he did not wish it to be noticed. In short, wishing to describe the maiden to his chieftain in the most graphic manner, he, with youthful vehemence, asserted that she was, in the opinion of everyone, the exact image of her mother, both in person and manners, and these words were the first sparks—but we must not forestall events.

Our party embarked altogether in a hired gondola, and arrived at Limonta towards evening. Here they found a rumour current that the Abbot of San Ambrogio was determined to punish severely the insurrection, whatever might be the issue of the ordeal. This and other causes united together, the arrival that morning of the poor drowned corpse, the harrowing spectacle of the desolation of his parents, and the long waiting for the Count's boat, so surprisingly deferred, now all helped to cool that first ardour of gratitude towards the youthful victor; so that when Lupo came ashore, he did not find the crowd he expected, nor was he received with the triumph and applause he had hoped for. He remembered certain proud dreams he had allowed his fancy to indulge in when seated on the prow of the boat the day before, as he left the shore of Bellano, and felt somewhat mortified.

The priest remained at Limonta; all the others, mount-

ing horses which were in readiness for them, ascended the steep and narrow road to the castle.

Ermelinda received with her usual kindness her young guest, who was especially welcome to her from the remembrance of the close friendship that once had subsisted between him and her poor son; but very soon she began to experience some uneasiness at the attentions she saw him bestow on Beatrice—and the more that it did not escape the penetration of the good mother that the girl received them with much modest complacency.

Soon she observed that a conscious and reserved happiness had taken the place of the open, frank mirth of the young maiden; she saw her blush if she questioned her about Ottorino, and lower her eyes, not daring to meet the maternal glance, so that she began to be seriously disturbed. Not that she considered this an unsuitable match for her daughter, for indeed it would have been impossible to provide for her in a more distinguished manner, but there was a general report that the young knight was already engaged to marry a daughter of Franchino Rusconi, a noble of Como, and that Marco Visconti was arranging the affair.

As to the Count, enchanted to have in his house a knight of such reputation, a cousin of the Abbot, a follower of Marco, he was much occupied in making the visit as pleasant as possible; and whenever it was a question of a banquet, a hunting party, or an expedition in the neighbourhood, Beatrice was always with them, for her father could not bear to stir without her. At every moment he sang the praises of his young guest, and it was his pleasure to go over all that he had done for their protection at the time of the shipwreck, recalling every moment of that day, of those hours passed on the rocks, which the girl remembered perhaps already only too well, and always with an emotion, and with a thrill which was not all terror.

The Count had discovered recently in the knight one virtue which, in his eyes, gave a higher value to all the others: and this was a deference to his opinion; a willing

perseverance in listening to all the stories of his doings, and in acquiescing in his boasting chat.

"He is a polite youth," he said; "not like those raw boys one sees now-a-days, who are hardly out of the nursery, when they pretend to instruct their elders. Did you notice," he asked Beatrice, one day, "how, when I was explaining to him all the circumstances of the combat between Lupo and Ramengo, how attentively he listened to me for a couple of hours, without stirring a finger?" And this was the simple truth, for all that time the boy, who was sitting close to Beatrice, was as one might say, in a trance, and had never heard a syllable of what was said.

If Ermelinda departed at times from her usual diffidence, and begged her husband to be more on his guard, he called her fears ridiculous fancies, and desired her to be silent on the subject. The good lady, not being able as she wished, to clear up the affair by mentioning it candidly to Ottorino, because the Count had decidedly forbidden her to do so, was obliged to be content with the only other course open to her, which was to write to Como to ascertain the truth and the nature of the engagement into which the knight had entered, and while she was waiting for the information, to watch her daughter carefully, and to try to keep her from the company of the youthful guest, and to distract her thoughts from him.

The maiden, though slightly self-willed and capricious, as young people are apt to be, was in the main of a very sweet disposition: as it happened, she had always loved her mother with more reverence, and even tenderness, notwithstanding her occasional severity, than the Count with all his indulgence; and was more pleased with a smile or caress from her than with all her father's more open demonstrations.

But since Ottorino had been at the castle, a noticeable change in this particular had arisen. Ermelinda, with her somewhat cold manner, with those words sometimes of admonition, sometimes of reproof, held the girl at a distance, chilled and blighted as it were her

soul, full of a new life, of an unknown sensation which prompted her to confidence and enthusiasm. The name of the young man, which filled her with joy when mentioned by the Count, caused her to tremble with fright, when she heard it from her mother; in consequence she escaped as much as she could from being alone with her, and it is not to be wondered at that the great love which she had always borne her should diminish from day to day in some degree. What more shall I say? She, having at times surprised in her heart a shrinking distaste which quite alarmed her, would then reproach herself bitterly and make a thousand good resolutions to return to her former filial cordiality, which she had not the strength to keep.

This struggle lasted a few more days, when suddenly a message arrived from Marco Visconti, which caused Ottorino to announce that in two days he was expected at Milan.

To Beatrice this appeared a dream; she could not realize that he would really have to depart; she found it so charming to be with him; when she was separated from him, she thought how she should see him again in two, three, or four hours; this thought occupied and consoled her during the whole time of his absence; the hours passed away, and Ottorino re-appeared; but when he was gone what should she do all the day, all those long evenings?

She recalled to her mind the happy days she had spent in her home, before this fatal guest had come. Her mother, her young attendant, her lute, her books, her bay steed: but her heart no longer responded to these images, formerly so much to her; it was like touching the keys of a harpsichord of which the strings were broken.

The next day, the day before Ottorino's departure, was destined by the Count to be the occasion of a hawking-party, and Beatrice had already been told that she was to accompany it.

"I want you to see my birds fly," said her father to his guest, "and you shall tell me if Marco Visconti has

any to compare to them; you will see sparrow-hawks, Irish gerfalcons, and some from Norway and Denmark; I have some brought up at home, and others from foreign parts: and a splendid pack of hounds famous for both staunchness and breed. And then I have to show you my favourite falcon, trained by myself, because I like accustoming one of them to my hand on a new plan, which I have invented myself."

That same day arrived a letter from Como, after receiving which, Ermelinda remained for a long time in consultation with her husband. Beatrice from her room, where she had shut herself up with her attendant, heard the voices of her parents raised with the excitement of a dispute, and guessed the subject of it only too well.

All the day she managed to keep away from her mother, and to join her only in the evening at supper. She saw her then silent and sad, and from time to time looking at the girl as if she had a secret to reveal to her. Afraid to find herself alone with her, as soon as she could do so fairly, under excuse of having to rise early in the morning for the chase, she took the liberty of retiring for the night. As soon as she was shut into her room she felt new life, and seated herself before a mirror to have her hair arranged by Lauretta before lying down. The damsel, who had discovered the secret of her young mistress's heart, began to speak of Ottorino with hidden meaning, which Beatrice would willingly have resented, and would have shown her displeasure, if the flames of colour which the words called to her cheeks could have been attributed to irritation rather than to modesty.

The hair being finished, Lauretta was about to undress her, when a gentle knock was heard at the door, and Ermelinda's voice saying, "Open; it is I."

"Leave me with her," continued she to the attendant, who had hastened to undo the fastenings, and now with a curtsey retired into the next room.

Beatrice, now alone with her mother, would have gladly sunk through the floor with confusion, and casting down her eyes, waited for what she was to hear.

"I see that my presence is not welcome," began Er-

melinda, "and I grieve to see it; and I grieve for you, my child."

The maiden tried to answer, but her voice was stifled; she stammered indistinctly some senseless words, and then was silent.

"I never could have believed that you would fear your mother," continued the lady; "it is true that lately I have seen that you are changed in some way towards me, that you are not so fond of me as you used to be; but what have I done to you to make you afraid? It is too sad for one who loves you so much."

"I do not fear: why should I?" answered the girl, vehemently, for the vexation of seeing herself so agitated had restored some of the natural vigour of her character.

"Beatrice, why do you answer with such irritation?" said the mother in a severe voice; but afterwards, as if she could not resist a sudden impulse, she took one of her daughter's hands in hers, and went on: "Listen to me, my dear; do not speak so to your mother. Do you believe that I could have any thought or care in the world but to see you happy? I have no other blessing but you—you are my only comfort. Oh! if you could know how grieved I am every time I see myself obliged to thwart you; but it is necessary sometimes when it is my duty, and for your good. Do you remember, my darling, when you were very little, and fell very ill, and one day were crying to have some milk? You may believe that it nearly broke my heart to refuse you the milk, but I did so, for it would have been injurious to you. Now I know not what may have been passing through that obstinate little head, but you will understand now."

"But what do you mean to imply?" asked Beatrice, half moved, and half angry at her own emotion.

"I mean this—but come, do not look at me with those frightened eyes. No, my dear daughter, you will never hear a bitter word from your mother's mouth; come here, listen to me, calmly and tenderly, as I promise to speak to you. Ottorino goes to-morrow."

The girl, at the mention of that name, felt herself turn to ice, but, putting force on herself, she answered with the greatest appearance of indifference that she could muster, "Yes, I know; but what is that to me?"

"More than I could wish for yours and my peace," replied Ermelinda in a stern voice; "do not deceive me; you cannot blind one who reads your heart."

"But what harm have I done? I have only obeyed my father."

"Yes, you were very anxious to obey your father these few last days, more anxious than you ever were before. Once you paid some little attention to my wishes, and without displeasing him, you ruled your life according to my counsels; but, my poor child, I do not mean to reprimand you, you did not know what you were doing —you thought, perhaps—it is true the fault is in a great degree also mine, but I ought to have spoken to you before with greater decision; and yet I also had a secret hope, but now I know positively——"

"And what do you know?" asked the girl, fixing her eyes on her mother's as if to draw out the sense of her words before she uttered them.

"I know that Ottorino—in short, you must never think again of him, because he has already given his promise, and soon will be the husband of the daughter of Franchino Rusconi, a noble of Como."

Beatrice became as red as fire, and then as pale as if she had just risen from the dead; she, however, tried for another moment to control herself, forcing on her trembling lips a smile, which soon was dissipated, for, quite overwhelmed and conquered by her feelings, she began to weep.

The mother read in those tears the confession which shame had extinguished on the lips, and so putting her arms round her daughter, and tenderly kissing her, she said, "Yes, weep, my darling, weep with your mother. Do you think I do not know how to pity you, that I think less well of you for this, that you have fallen in my opinion? No, my dear, my good child. If it was

possible for you to be nearer my heart than you were before, you are so now on account of these tears."

Beatrice, subdued by these words, and still more by the inexpressible affection with which they were pronounced, threw her arms round her mother's neck, and hid in that loving bosom her heated face, and while still sobbing clung to her with affection.

"Now, you see for yourself," Ermelinda went on to say, still much affected; "you see that it will not be seemly for you to be with him so familiarly as you were before; and that if your father still gives you opportunities, it is that he is far from having the least suspicion of his precious daughter; but you who know your weakness, might by chance even betray yourself to him himself. In short, decorum demands that you should keep yourself away from him. To-morrow he will be out all day, and you will stay with me; the day after, he is going away, and you will be free from all anxiety, and everything will remain secret between us two." She was going on to tell her what to reply to her father if he came in the morning to summon her for the hawking-party, but at that moment she heard a footstep come up the stairs, which she recognized as the Count's; and, not wishing to be found there by him, she tore herself hastily from her daughter's arms, and, giving and receiving a last kiss, she went out, saying, "Your father is there; I must go."

Beatrice spent some time in composing herself, and then called her damsel to undress her. Lauretta saw that she was quite overcome, and did not venture to speak to her; except when she had put her to bed, she asked, according to her usual custom, what book she should bring her to read that evening. "Shall I give you the one you like so much, with the devils and the tortured souls?" [1]

"No; lower the curtains, put out the light, and go away."

[1] The "Inferno" of Dante; at that time (1329), only eight years after the death of the writer, a novelty in Italy, eagerly sought after by all people in whatever rank or station of life.

"And in the morning I am to awake you at dawn, am I not, so as to be ready for the hawking?"

"No, do not come till I call you——"

"And what dress?"

"That is enough, go and leave me alone."

"Rough weather to-night," said the maid to herself, and obeyed.

Then Beatrice, throwing aside all restraint in her misery, pressed her face against the pillows so that her sobs should not be heard. The bed seemed to her to be full of thorns and briars; she could find rest in no position; she sat up, so as to recover her breath, then returned to hide herself under the coverlid, and to pour out her soul in disconsolate weeping.

It seemed to her as if she could see the daughter of Rusconi, looking beautiful and proud, riding on the shores of Como, and Ottorino galloping gaily at her side, and exchanging with her soft words and caresses. She tried in every way to dismiss these images, struggled with all her might to forget the past, to throw herself into the future, to find some resting-place; but the past and the future were alike—languid and dead and monotonous: she only saw in life an end of all things; every attempt to change the subject of her thoughts ended in the same cruel fancies returning stronger than ever for being repulsed, like a victorious army taking forcible possession of an assaulted citadel.

At last, conquered by fatigue and trouble, she sank into a tardy slumber, full of agitated dreams. But when in the morning she awoke, a little before dawn, she felt a faint ray of hope, without knowing whence she had derived it; and when she again thought of her sorrows, there burst on her an idea which must have slowly worked into her mind during the night, and, in some measure, cooled the great flame that had been kindled there.

This idea was, that it was possible what her mother had told her of Ottorino might not be true, and that she ought not too hastily to condemn him. So straightforward and good as he was, she said to herself, and

after his frank and open conduct! And yet the first belief continued to make her heart ache, and she longed to be relieved from it. If she could have found herself with her father, it would have been easy to have made him clear up this mystery, without allowing him to perceive the real clue to it; but her father was to start at dawn, and if she did not accompany him she would not see him till evening, she would remain all the day in this agony of mind, and on his return it might be difficult to see him alone, so as to make him act before Ottorino departed, and he was to go very early the next day. She resolved to rise betimes to be ready at the first summons, to see her father alone while the last preparations were going on, and to lead him to her purpose, firmly decided, at the same time, not in any case to accompany him on the expedition, in order not to disobey her mother.

She then called Lauretta to dress her, who arrayed her in the hunting-dress, prepared the evening before, without Beatrice, who was deep in her own thoughts, perceiving it. When she heard her father's voice, she went down into his room, where she found him alone.

The Count hastened to meet his daughter: "Now," he said, "everything is ready; let us go."

"I am only come, dear father, to salute you, and wish you good morning," replied Beatrice, much embarrassed.

"Why, you silly child, what nonsense is this?"

"No," said she, resisting him when he was about to lead her out. "Let me stay here a minute; sit down, and let us speak a few words."

"You will have time to say a thousand words to me, instead of a few. We shall be together all day. Now that you are ready let us go without delaying the others."

"I have told you that I am not coming, and that I wish to stay at home."

"And I tell you to have done with such nonsense, and not to play the child."

Directly after this dispute Ottorino appeared in the

room, and after the usual greetings, asking the father's leave, he took the maiden's hand, and conducted her into a courtyard, where a palfrey was awaiting her. The girl, as if bewitched, made no resistance; for one instant the idea of her mother's displeasure flashed across her mind, but how could she turn back, now that she was found at this early hour in her riding-dress? She would have to explain, to give her reasons, and she felt her mind waver, and indeed at that juncture had no breath to utter a word.

The young knight took the horse's bridle from the hand of a page, and gave it to the damsel; and then, bending one knee on the ground, with the other he made a support for her delicate foot, and, hardly touching him, she sprang up into the saddle.

Ottorino arranged her stirrup, the father familiarly took his arm, and they set off on foot, followed by the falconer and by four pages, with falcons on their wrists, and dogs in leashes.

The Count began to talk of his hounds and his sparrow-hawks to the young man, who, you may believe did not listen to him with much attention when he saw Beatrice at his side, not uttering a word, or ever raising her eyes to his face.

He, after having asked her if she was well, if anything had happened, how she liked the ride, what she thought of the weather, and such-like subjects, became entirely silent, for the manner with which she received these observations deprived him of all courage to renew them. And thus the field remained open to the Count, who took every advantage of it, as was his wont.

After perhaps a couple of hours, they arrived in a chestnut wood, when the pages and the falconer loosed the dogs from the leashes, who dispersed about, ranging in all directions with their noses down, while the hawking-party and Ambrose ascended a hillock which looked over the scene of action.

They were hardly arrived there, when the Count turning to his daughter, said to her, "Look at Diana, how keen she is!" and pointed to a setting dog who was

coming towards them, with its nose intent on the ground, waving its tail. "How steady she is! she is after a woodcock. Quick, take off Garbino's hood; quick—how slow you are this morning! Let him fly now that he has seen it; so, that's right! Look what a fine flight! Oh, nothing escapes him! Well done, my Garbino! With what fury he seizes it! See, he has got it!"

In fact, the falcon might now be seen to descend from the air with its prey, and fall with it in a heap, on the skirts of the little hill where the sportsmen had taken up their position. The Count ran down to take his woodcock from Garbino's claws, and the young knight took the opportunity to approach Beatrice, and to say, in an agitated manner, "For pity's sake, tell me what is the matter! If I have vexed you in any way, do not torment me thus, Beatrice, I implore you; you know I must leave you to-morrow."

"I know," interrupted the girl, with a smile that ill concealed the bitterness of her heart; "I know that you go to-morrow, for my mother has told me something of which you left me in ignorance; she has told me that you are to take the road to Como."

Although she tried to say these words with indifference, she could not help showing her secret feeling, and this the young man rapidly perceived.

He turned quite red, and began: "Hear me! I cannot deny—I had not seen you then—but I swear to you on my honour, Beatrice, I swear that for you alone—" but his words were cut short by the arrival of the Count, who was crying out to his falconer—"Give the bird his bill-full, and put on the hood quickly."

The maiden was convinced by the words, and still more by the agitation, of her companion, that the news her mother had announced to her was true. All at once she felt struck down, and as it were annihilated; but recovering herself as quickly as she could, and feeling deeply ashamed of her humiliation, she felt her native pride return to her heart, nourished as it had been so long by the habit of seeing everything yield to her wishes; and from that moment showing herself intent on the

dogs and the falcons, as if she was really devoted to the sport, she never left all that day her father's side, nor addressed a word or look to Ottorino, so that she succeeded in poisoning all the pleasure he had promised himself from that expedition.

The morning after, the young knight departed for Milan, accompanied by Lupo; and she, full of her resentment, at first felt his going a real relief. Her mother appeared grave and severe that day, and this only increased her anger; far from acknowledging her fault, she considered herself to be the one offended.

Disgusted with everybody and everything, she retired early to rest that evening, and the waiting-maid, who saw that her brow was again clouded, left her with her light burning, and departed as quickly as she could. She took from her table a parchment volume bound in leather, which was the "Inferno" of Dante.

When Lauretta, the evening before, spoke of a book with devils and lost souls, she meant this one, because at the beginning of each canto there was an illumination which represented their figures. How priceless that copy would be considered in a collection in our days!

Beatrice pursued this study unknown to her mother; and even the Count required a great deal of urging before allowing her to read the book. It was not at all that he was afraid that the "Divina Commedia" would not be proper reading for a young girl; no, it was only because of an old grudge which he had against Alighieri, on account of the Latin work entitled, "De Monarchia," published by that staunch Ghibelline many years before, as we have already mentioned, and which now, in these present times—that is to say, some years after the death of the author—began to make a great noise in Italy and Germany.

Only a few days before Ottorino's arrival at the castle, the Count had at last granted the long-wished-for volume to his daughter. It was, however, only the first poem, for though in Tuscany at that time the "Purgatorio" and some cantos of the "Paradiso" were read, in Lombardy the "Inferno" alone was known.

Beatrice had begun to read it in the evening, when she was shut up alone in her room, and studied it with great eagerness; and the delight naturally to be tasted in those weird pages, full of life and passion, was increased by the sad charm which the rebellious hearts of the daughters of Eve find in forbidden fruit.

She stretched out, as we have said, her hand to take the volume, opened it, and heard something rustle among the leaves, and afterwards fall to the ground. What could it be? A paper—a letter—for her? From whom? But was there need to ask that?

CHAPTER VII.

THE reader will remember the half-finished speech which the Count addressed under his breath to Ottorino on the subject of Marco and Ermelinda when they were on their way from Bellano, to the effect that the Visconte in past times had tried hard to win that lady for his wife, and that terrible misadventures had prevented this result, and had caused much strife and bloodshed. Now Beatrice, who, without appearing to do so, had, as we have said, heard everything, felt a great inclination to learn the particulars of this affair; and not thinking it right to question outsiders, had often asked her waiting-maid to learn the story from her own mother, the falconer's wife, who had been from a girl in the service of Ermelinda, and would know everything at length.

Lauretta, to whom everything appeared right that would please her mistress, and who desired now more than ever to find means to encourage and cheer her, instead of always seeing her weary and sad, set herself to coax her mother with such loving caresses that she, after having put the story off from day to day, at last, one evening when they were alone, making a long preamble that these were not things for a girl to know, and that she must take care never to repeat them, began the history in this manner:—

"Simon Crivello, the father of Ermelinda, was very intimate with the father of Marco, and meeting often at each other's houses, the young people, as was natural, had become attached, and Marco had promised my mistress to marry her. Young people are too quick about such things; they ought to find out first what their parents think. As to Crivello, he would have accepted the match willingly, but the difficulties all came from

the side of Matteo Visconti, father of Marco, who was at that time among the very first in the land, and wished his son to mate with nothing less than great princesses and daughters of crowned kings. Time passed on, and nothing came of it. And mark this! Ermelinda ought at the beginning to have listened to her mother, who told her that she should not speak to one who could never hope to marry her. She had sure enough told her this, but young people will not be ruled."

"Well, at last what happened?" interrupted Lauretta, impatient to come to the point.

"Why, I'll tell you what did happen; the Visconti were driven out of Milan, the Torriani got in there, and it was clear that my lady's father, who had been so friendly with Matteo, was one of the chief people in managing the intrigue."

"Oh, what a shocking thing, and only for revenge at the alliance being refused!"

"Only too true! Then Crivello, anxious to show the new lords that he had entirely broken with the Visconti, and for fear that Ermelinda should ever have a chance of being reconciled to Marco, wished to make her at once marry another man, the very Count here, who had offered for her some time before. Fancy, the poor thing! what a situation for her! She would not hear of breaking her promise to the Visconti, and she had to bear at home anger, and misery, and threats; so that she did nothing but weep, and had no comfort of her life. Thus about twenty days passed away, when (just listen, now) I was awoke one night by a loud knocking at the door of my room, and called out, 'Who is it?' 'Your father, who has just come back from the Holy Land, and wants to see you directly,' one of the grooms of the house answered. In truth, my father had gone on a pilgrimage to the Holy Sepulchre some time ago, and was expected back every day. I quickly threw on a few clothes and ran to open the door; and there came in a man dressed as a pilgrim, with a hood over his eyes and a dark lantern in his hand. I threw my arms round his neck. He put down the lantern and raised his hood.

My child, such a fright I have never had since. Guess who it was."

"Who? Marco?"

"Yes, sure, Marco Visconti himself in flesh and blood, with his two eyes starting out of his head, asked me, 'Where is Ermelinda?' 'For the love of God, for the Holy Virgin's sake! what do you want here?' I said to him; but he gripped my arm so that it remained livid for days afterwards. 'Where is Ermelinda?' he insisted. 'You have not come for any evil purpose?' I managed to say; 'for pity's sake, have mercy on that poor creature, who is already half dead!' 'Is she in there?' he said, pointing to the room where she was. I, who scarcely knew what I did, said, 'Yes;' and he made two or three steps towards the door, then suddenly stopped, as if he changed his mind, and said to me, 'Go in and tell her quietly that I am waiting here to speak to her.' What ought I to have done? Escape? that was impossible. Scream out?—he would have strangled me. So I went and found my lady, already half risen, who at my appearance asked me in a fright, 'What does that light mean, and who is there?' and because I did not answer at once, she began to cry, 'Shut the door!—shut the door!' But just then there was heard a pleading voice, 'Ermelinda, do not fear; it is I, your Marco!'

"Have you ever seen Tita, Tonio's wife, when all of a sudden she is seized with a fit while she is talking and laughing? Well, just like her, my mistress became as white as a sheet, and fainted dead away, so that I thought she was dead, and ran out tearing my hair and weeping like a lost soul.

"Marco, who out of good manners had not ventured before to come in, now took the lantern, and we entered the room together, and made her smell all kinds of scents, and bathed her face and temples, so that she opened her eyes and came to herself. You ought to have seen how like a lamb he behaved then; afterwards, they say, he became a villain, a very devil. It may be true; I do not deny it; but he was then a good youth, and feared God, and I can bear witness to it; for see,

he did not venture to raise a finger to touch her, but did all he could for her recovery, looking at her with a reverence and a devotion as if she were, as one might say, the Madonna—so humbly that he did not seem to me like that great soldier and prince. When he saw that Ermelinda had recovered, 'I am here,' he said, 'to keep my promise—to marry you, and take you away with me.'

"'O holy Virgin! O Lord God!' exclaimed the girl, without being able to say anything else.

"And he then (I remember all his words as if they had only been spoken yesterday, they struck me so much, and then I have so often talked of them with my mistress), and he then, smiling, like one inclined to weep—

"'It seems to you not very courteous to ask you to leave your home to follow the fortunes of one who hardly knows where to lay his head.'

"'Do not say so,' answered my lady, 'do not speak like that; you break my heart. For God's sake, fly, fly soon, for if you are seen, may the Lord have pity on us!'

"'Fly!' repeated Marco. 'And do you think I have travelled so far, exposed myself to so many perils, concealing myself among people who would willingly give its weight in gold for my head, to turn back like a boy —like an idiot?'

"'But if my father found you here,' urged my mistress, 'woe to you!'

"'Woe to me! Oh! do you think that if I did not remember he was your father, I would leave this house with unstained hands?' Ermelinda trembled all over. 'Let us go at once,' insisted Marco. 'I have still some friends who will guide us till I have brought you to a safe place; there is a horse ready for you below, and when we get to Bergamo we will be betrothed. In the interval, try to think that you are with your brother, or that you are in church.'

"I had caught my lady by her dress, and whispered to her, imploring her to take care of herself. I must say that he soon found this out, for he put one hand on my

shoulder, and said, 'Enough, Marianna; leave her alone.' The words were not so terrible, but he uttered them with such a voice and expression, and with his eyes flashing, that I grew cold to my very marrow. I held up my hands, and felt turned to stone, as if I had seen a basilisk.

"Then, Ermelinda, recovering her speech somewhat, began to entreat him.

"'Do you want me to run away from my home at night in this way, as if I was a bad woman? It would make my poor mother die of grief and shame. Oh, no! let me alone; kill me, rather; kill me with your own hand, and I will submit.'

"Marco stood for a moment, looking down at her, and then uttered some mysterious words, which implied, that if she refused to follow him, he would not be content to have made this journey all for nothing, and that he should immediately seek her father to confront him. Perhaps, he said this only to frighten her into agreeing to his wishes; but, my lady, who took his meaning seriously, began to tremble, and threw herself down on the ground weeping, to implore him not to speak thus, but to give up his intention, and not terrify her so, or say such dreadful things with such passion! But he said nothing; and even seemed to wish to withdraw; and at last he appeared determined, and moved towards the door. Ermelinda then started to her feet like a mad thing, caught him by his arm, and cried out: 'No, you shall not leave this room till after you have killed me: I will defend him!'

"It was like throwing a pail of water on the fire. Visconti stopped, and resisted no longer. 'Very well,' he said, with a smile, fit to freeze all who saw it, 'be calm, you see I am still here; I will not move another step; do not be afraid of my escaping; call out, rouse the house, and summon the assassins, I will not stir!'

"It is impossible to describe the effect of these words on my mistress; she let her arms fall, stepped back, and remained a moment listening if any one was roused, but hearing that all was quiet, she joined her hands together,

and said: 'Oh, Marco! forgive me, he is my father, after all. How can you speak to me so cruelly? If you knew how it wounds me. Oh, God above is witness how I would willingly give my life to save yours! I implore you to go away—to escape from here; who knows if already you have not been discovered? Fly! for the love of God. If ever you have cared for me, fly now.'

"But he coldly, in reply, held out his hand to her and said: 'Let us go together then.' But when he saw that she drew back: 'No! you will not come? Well, I declare to you that I will not leave this room except in your company. See what I am doing?' and he sat down on the table, crossing one leg over the other, and folding his arms on his chest, as one resolved not to stir. 'I will wait here till to-morrow,' he went on, 'when some one must come in; perhaps, it will be your father; so if you want to preserve him from danger you know what you have to do. Go to the window, and cry out that Marco is in your room; let them come! let them come in troops, I shall not stir.'

"Fancy, what a dreadful position for us; I on one side, Ermelinda on the other, began to weep, and to implore him with as earnest prayers as when one prays before the cross; but it was just as lost labour as if one wanted to move Il Legnone out of its place.

"When my lady saw that there was no remedy, 'Then if you will compel me,' she said, and rising, she knelt down before the figure of the Madonna, which was at the head of her bed, and remained an instant in prayer, then rising, she said to me—'You will tell my mother.' But her tears stifled her voice. The young knight took her hand, and she walked after him with a vacant expression, as one asleep. But they were no farther than the threshold, when they heard a storm of footsteps dashing up the staircase. Marco stopped one moment; then drawing suddenly back, he struck his forehead and exclaimed—'We have no time now.' In the twinkling of an eye he had shut the door, locked it inside with the key, opened his doublet with one hand,

and drew out a poniard, with the other he took from his neck a gold chain, and with a vigorous pull, broke it in the middle, hid one half in his bosom, and placed the other in Ermelinda's hand, saying eagerly to her—'This will be the token of our constancy. I hope to return soon in another condition than now; in any case, do not break your word; till you receive the other half of this broken chain, you will know that I am alive, and that my only thought is to make you my wife.' He was still speaking, when a vehement knock was heard at the door. Marco opened a window, which looked on the garden, and leapt down. I ran to let in those outside, who were now storming at the door, as if they wished to batter it down. In rushed seven or eight armed men, and began to search everywhere; but hearing a loud uproar below, they went off in a great hurry to add to it.

"We poor creatures knew nothing more all night: there were shouts and steps and blows, then all was silence.

"In the morning Milan was full of the affair. In Crivello's garden, two servants of the house were found dead; and the story was, that Marco had already got in safety beyond the barriers, when he found that he had dropped his helmet, so he turned back, spurred his horse against a man who had picked up that piece of armour, gave him a blow on the temple which stretched him for dead on the ground, jumped down from his horse, recovered his helmet, sprung on his saddle, and was still in time to save himself."

At this point, Marianna, interrupting her story, said to her daughter, "The rest I will tell you another time, for you have been a long time here already, and your young lady may want you; so go along with you, my child."

"No," answered Lauretta, "she wants nothing, I have already put her to bed, and she has given me leave to stay till to-morrow morning; so go on, tell me the rest."

"You are a naughty girl, who wants everything her

own way, and when you have set your heart on anything——"

"Now, dear mother, do tell me, there's a darling."

"At least, learn a good lesson from the story, and see that children——"

"Yes, yes; go on."

"Now come more troubles for poor Ermelinda," said Marianna, resuming her narrative; "you will hear what that poor unfortunate creature suffered, and I also, in consequence, so listen. Crivello quite understood that Marco had come with the intention of carrying off his daughter, and imagining that it had been arranged between them, hurried up to her with even more anger than usual; and entering in a furious manner, assured her, with many protestations, that Marco, if he had taken her away, would never have married her; and abused him and all his family with great violence; ending up with telling her that she must decide between two courses: either to marry immediately the Count del Balzo, or to wither away below the earth, where she should not see the light of day. To tell the truth, Crivello had been much in fault himself; for as soon as he perceived that the marriage was impossible, he ought not to have allowed his daughter to continue to see Marco, but he hoped to be able to entrap the Visconti; and this in my country is called playing fast and loose."

"And then what happened?" asked Lauretta, to set the narrative again in train.

"Well, then, Ermelinda would not hear of breaking her faith to Visconti, and her father kept his word, and had her shut up in a tower. So this was the state of things, the daughter in love, and the father severe. But, no, I must tell you about myself, though what business had I in the middle of it all? It is an unlucky thing, daughter mine, to depend upon others, perhaps more particularly upon the great; and now you'll hear. One fine day, without any notice, they seized me, and stuck me in a nasty room, like a prison, and began to persecute me incessantly, and to frighten me in every way, and all to make me tell my mistress's secrets. I remained

firm for a time, but by degrees I allowed myself to be questioned, and began to relate all that I knew, from her first acquaintance with Marco down to his last appearance in Crivello's house, without concealing even the new compact of the young people, or the token of the chain which had passed between them; I told all, in short. After that I was allowed a little more liberty, and treated rather more gently; but as to leaving my prison, that was not their game at all! they kept me shut up for six months more; after which they told me that Ermelinda had married the Count, our master here; that she wished for me, and so if I liked to go back to her, as before, I might.

"You may believe that I did not require much urging. They took me to Limonta, where I found my mistress, who did not look like a bride, but more like a corpse risen from the tomb, so fallen away did she look, and so gone off in beauty. She gave me a most warm welcome, and presently told me that Marco had sent her back the token of the chain, which she showed to me; and I saw it was the identical one, for I compared it with the piece she still had, which left no doubt on the subject. Then she told me the manner in which he had returned it to her.

"During the time she was confined in the tower, she was allowed to go out on the leads every day to breathe a little fresh air. The tower looked on a court-yard, where no one ever entered except the family of the Lord of the Manor; till one day, after perhaps four months, a buffoon was admitted, who began to show off a number of tricks, and at last threw in the air four or five oranges, one after the other, caught them, and threw them up again, while a Moorish girl danced to the sound of a pipe. Now, while she sat among the battlements looking at these wonders, she felt one of the oranges fall into her lap, and saw written on the rind these words—Marco and Ermelinda—so she opened the orange and found in it a letter and the piece of chain I told you about."

"Why, what a deceiver he was!" burst out Lauretta;

"it was acting basely to give her up after so many vows and fiery protestations."

"Stop a minute, don't be so hasty, and you will hear. My lady read me the letter, which, young as she was, she could make out as well as a clerk. He said that he had heard what her father had made her suffer for his sake, and he would not be the cause of her death; that he was also vehemently pressed by his own family to marry a daughter of the Lord of Verona, who had promised to assist in recovering his lost territory, and so he went on, and concluded by releasing my mistress from her promise, sending her the token agreed upon; and then he actually himself urged her to agree to marry the Count del Balzo, who, he said, if he had no other recommendation, was not at any rate an enemy of the Visconti."

"But then I was quite right," insisted Lauretta.

"If you would only let me finish."

"Well, go on. I'll not interrupt you again as long as you have breath."

"Well, a year after (now attend), Ermelinda was out hunting one day on the plain of Colico, and being apart from the rest, she saw riding an armed man towards her, with his visor down, who, when he was close to her, stopped, and said,—'I am come to demand from the Countess del Balzo the token given by Marco to Ermelinda.' She recognized the voice immediately, and nearly fell from her horse; but had just strength enough to take from her bosom, where she always kept them, the letter and the chain, and presented them to the knight who had asked her for them."

"It was Marco, was it not?"

"He himself. He read the writing, looked at the chain, and gnashing his teeth like a wild beast, exclaimed,—'The letter is forged, the chain was stolen from me; we have both been betrayed! Farewell, Ermelinda! we may perhaps never meet again; but if I survive this shock you will hear more of me.' And then to shake his bridle, plunge his spurs into his horse's flanks, and to disappear behind some thickets, was the work of a moment."

"Poor fellow!" exclaimed the girl, much affected.

"In time," pursued Marianna, "it became known that the chain had been taken from Marco's neck while he was sick unto death, and sent to Crivello by, whom do you think? By that same groom who had knocked at my door that night I described, and who had then escaped with Visconti, and had entered his service. Out of greediness for a large sum of money offered him by Crivello, the wretch betrayed his new master as he had done his old one; but it was not necessary for him to go to the Pope to get absolution. No, in truth, Marco set off to find him in France, where he had taken refuge, and killed him with his own hand."

"Served him right!" said Lauretta again; "it was only what the rogue deserved."

"And Ermelinda's father had also to pay dearly for his treachery, for Marco came upon him at Trezzo, while fording the Adda, and pierced him through with a lance."

"Now, I understand," said the daughter, "why our mistress, when she by chance hears Marco's name mentioned, shakes all over, and seems to feel a shock through her whole frame. But what was the explanation of the buffoon and the oranges?"

"Can't you guess? That was a cunning invention of Crivello's to give colour to the affair, and make his daughter fall into the trap."

"Oh! what a number of wicked devices to destroy a poor creature!" exclaimed Lauretta; and then she thanked her mother for her kindness, and ran off at once to tell Beatrice all she had heard.

Having now come to the point where this Marco, of whom we have spoken so often, first comes on the scene, and will now take a considerable share in the events we are about to relate, we must endeavour to lay before our readers some idea of his past history and general character.

Marco Visconti, the second son of the great Matteo, had followed his father with fidelity and affection both in prosperity and adversity, and had always been his

favourite. He was of a noble disposition, a ready wit, and of great bodily activity, so that he had always been among the first in all bodily sports and exercises which appertained to a gentleman, according to the fashion of the time. Yet even from a boy his incomparable superiority had been forgiven by all his rivals on account of the modesty of his demeanour, a virtue rendered more than usually pleasing in him because of his noble birth, his handsome countenance, and his personal activity. But woe to any one that really crossed his inclinations, or attempted to restrain his passionate and impetuous nature, untamable both in anger and affection. No one but his father, as long as he lived, had any authority to control his impetuosity.

A valiant and fortunate leader in the field, he had acquired by degrees a glorious reputation as one of the first captains of the age. The most celebrated of all his exploits was the siege of Genoa, began and carried out by him with a skill and determination which were considered marvellous at the time, against the whole power of the Church, the chief Guelph cities of Italy, and King Robert of Sicily. It was on that occasion, that having received an intimation from that monarch, that if he did not at once retire from the Genoese territory, he might expect to see him under the walls of Milan, he sent back word to King Robert, that he need not trouble himself to go so far as that, as he was to be found beneath the walls of Genoa itself at any time, and challenged him formally to single combat; whereat history says, the king was very angry, but thought it best to take no notice.

Galeazzo, Marco's elder brother, who afterwards succeeded his father Matteo in the government of Milan, was jealous of the reputation acquired by his younger brother, and had frequently remonstrated with his father for entrusting him with the flower of his troops, especially in such desperate enterprises; which had engendered a secret grudge between the two brothers.

But Matteo having died at a most critical period, excommunicated by the Pope, and not at all sure of the

allegiance of his subjects, besides being hemmed in by enemies on every side, his sons at once recognized the necessity of all acting together; so Marco reconciled himself with his elder brother, and was of the greatest assistance to him in the long fight he had to sustain against the Church and the exiles.

However, as soon as Galeazzo found himself firmly settled in his hereditary dominions, he made himself so obnoxious to the Milanese by his tyrannical conduct, and exorbitant taxation, that they soon were anxious to regain the liberties of their old municipal life. Marco, too, refusing to submit to the despotic rule of his brother over a state that he had preserved and enlarged at the risk of his own life, joined the malcontents in an endeavour to bring about a change of government, and when the Ghibelline chiefs of several of the Italian cities went to solicit Lewis of Bavaria, the Emperor elect of Germany, to come to their assistance, Marco (as some historians relate) went with them to Trent, and accused his brother before that prince of intriguing with the Pope to make his peace with the Church, and so betraying the cause of the Ghibellines and the empire. The same chroniclers go on to say, that it was in consequence of that accusation that Lewis came to Milan, and laid hands upon Galeazzo, his son Azzone, and his two brothers, Luchino and Giovanni; and having confined them in the fortress of Monza, placed the territory under the government of a viceroy of his own, Baron Guglielmo di Monteforte.

But other contemporary historians assert, that it was Marco himself who was arrested by the Bavarian, and imprisoned with his brothers and his nephew, and one writer says that afterwards he succeeded in escaping, though others pretend that he obtained his release from Lewis himself.

But this much is certain, that a short time afterwards, when the Emperor passed from Lombardy into Tuscany, and thence to Rome, when he committed the extraordinary folly of deposing John XXII. in favour of another Pope after his own heart, Marco Visconti formed

one of his suite, and was high in his favour, and did his utmost, both himself and by the aid of his friends, and specially by that of Castruccio Castracani, Lord of Lucca, to obtain the release of his relations. At last the Emperor granted his request, and after eight months' suffering, the Visconti were set free from the celebrated prisons, the Forni (ovens) di Monza. These were certain chambers, placed one above another in the various levels of the rocks, into which you were let down by a hole in the roof, completely dark, with a convex and uneven floor, and so low and narrow that a person could neither stand upright nor lie down at full length, but was forced to remain either in a stooping position, or standing bent double, with indescribable torture. Galeazzo himself had invented those horrible places, to torment his state prisoners in, but was however the first to try them, thus fulfilling a prophecy current at the very time when they were in course of construction.

Soon after his liberation, Galeazzo, worn out by the severity of his incarceration, died near Pistoja, and thus gave an opportunity for a large party at Milan, where the Baron di Monteforte had already made himself unbearable, to declare themselves in favour of Marco.

But whether it was that Lewis the Bavarian took umbrage at the name of that formidable captain, and at the affection felt by the Milanese for him, and felt that he could not hope to domineer at his will over a disposition like his, or that he would not run the risk of changing the order of succession already established by custom, or that the Ghibelline lords threw suspicion on Marco's fidelity, or lastly, whether his two brothers, Luchino and Giovanni, who were more in favour of the pretensions of their young nephew Azzone, managed to gain over the Emperor with large promises of money, of which he was always very fond, and at that time was more in need of than usual, it is a fact that Lewis of Bavaria appointed Azzo Visconti, the son of Galeazzo, as viceroy of the city and district, he binding himself to pay Lewis a large sum for the investiture.

The Milanese were furious at this, and Marco, of-

fended with the Emperor, his brother, his nephew, and the Ghibelline nobles, began a secret intrigue with the city of Florence and with Cardinal Bertrando del Poggetto, the Pope's legate in Lombardy, and obtained from them, as it appears, large promises of men and money to help him to reinstate himself in the sovereignty of his father's dominions.

And at this point in his history our story begins to treat of him in person.

CHAPTER VIII.

OTTORINO, who had hastened to Milan, in obedience to the summons sent him, now entered Marco's palace, leaving Lupo in an outer hall in company with some soldiers, while he passed on into an inner room, where the master of the house was, at that moment, engaged in dictating a letter to his secretary.

Marco, a man of tall and powerful stature, at the time of this narrative had reached the prime of life. The hardships which he had endured in his laborious and stormy career had worn off the bloom and fire of youth, and had substituted instead a stern and serene gravity, a tempered pride, a somewhat melancholy expression which, without being absolutely soured and perturbed by care and trouble, still shadowed forth the habitual restlessness of his spirit. His face, which was thin and unusually colourless, was set off by a thick, soft, and coal-black beard, and by a pair of piercing eyes, surmounted by overhanging eyebrows. From time to time the fierce workings of his mind brought back the colour to his cheeks, and with it the appearance of his early youth and beauty, joined to a singular mixture of haughtiness and diffidence. But at times, when seized with a paroxysm of rage, his countenance was, in one instant, entirely transformed; then his habitual pallor merged into a deathly hue, his forehead assumed an awful frown, his eyes became dark and lurid with an evil light, and the complete change might be compared to the effect produced on the polished surface of a lake, when a gust of wind stirs it suddenly and excites a storm.

He wore a mantle of black velvet, open in front and lined with miniver, over a silk doublet fastened at the waist by a band with a rich golden buckle, and in the

belt was a large poniard with a handle covered with rubies; one of those weapons called at that time "misericordie," because when an enemy was vanquished in the fight, this served to despatch him, giving him, in short, the *coup de grace.*

His head was uncovered, and his black hair was parted on his ample and noble forehead, and fell in thick masses round his temples. When he saw Ottorino enter the room, he made him a sign with his hand to sit down, saying, "One moment, and I am at your service;" then turning to his secretary, who, with his pen suspended, looked at his master, and made a movement to retire, "No, no," he said, "go on, my cousin here ought to know everything," and continued to dictate the last sentences of a letter to the legate of the Pope at Bologna. The letter was in the rough Latin of that time, and the words which concluded it—those first heard by Ottorino —translated as follows, ran thus:—

"Castel Leprio and the Martesana still obey my voice" (these districts were fiefs of Marco), "the friends of the republic are not exhausted, the lion is asleep now, but when I have roused him his roaring will be heard as far as the Vatican; the bearded drunkard" (the appellation used in Milan to denote Lewis the Bavarian) "will bite his nails soon. Long live the Church! and death to the traitors to their country! my old war-cry."

To understand the force of these last words, we must explain that Marco had uttered them eight years before, when having discomfited the Pope's people, he had attacked some Milanese exiles, who were fighting among them. They were words that became famous at that time, and that showed that in his secret heart Visconti was not inimical to the Church, even when he opposed her arms in hand.

When the letter was finished, and the secretary departed, Marco said to Ottorino with a smile: "So you are back at last! You hardly expected that I should send after you, did you?"

"I did not think," began the boy, excusing himself.

"Enough—you are here now, and all is forgiven."

A few other words were exchanged, and then Marco, putting his hand familiarly on his cousin's shoulder, began to relate to him the causes that had determined him in becoming reconciled with the Pope at Avignon, and confided to him all his new schemes.

"So now it must be, 'Long live Pope Giovanni!'" exclaimed Ottorino; "but what will become of Nicholas V., whose cause we have so often defended?"

"He will become what he is already, a schismatic, and a hypocrite."

"Then we must go to school, so as to learn the jargon of the Guelphs."

"But you see by these means we shall be again blessed by the Church," said Marco.

"Yes, but then the other side will excommunicate us," replied Ottorino.

Then the celebrated Captain, becoming serious, began, "After all, you know well that the legitimate Pope is the one at Avignon. He has persecuted my father, our family, all our friends; he has excommunicated us, he has done us all the evil in his power; but all the time he has never ceased to be the true Pope. Do you think I could feel at ease all these years, knowing myself under sentence of the Church?"

The youth, who had never suspected any feelings like these in the proud mind of his cousin, looked at him in astonishment, and listened to him, as he proceeded with an agitated mien. "The memory of my poor father has often saddened the joy of my triumphs. To see that venerable head, which you know might have raised itself proudly above all the princes of Italy, under the Pope's ban. He, the conqueror of the temporal forces of his enemy, always ridiculed the spiritual; but when full of years he felt the approach of his last days, and that the world was escaping from him, he began to fear him whom he had despised all his life. The night will never pass away from my recollection, when he, excited by awful fancies, sent for all his household and for the clergy of Saint Giovanni at Monza, and kneeling before the altar repeated the creed of our religion, declaring

that he wished to die in the pale of holy church, and weeping bitter tears that his head could not be laid in consecrated ground. If you had seen his face, which had been calm in the midst of dangers, and serene during the bitterness of exile, subdued by that mysterious terror!"

Ottorino could scarcely recover from his astonishment, and if it had not been for the vehemence with which Marco spoke, he would have questioned his being in earnest.

"I always believed," said the young fellow, at last, "that the case stood thus: Pope Giovanni was the heretic and Niccolo the rightful one: I heard it so stated by our theologians and by you, from whom, though you are a soldier, they could often learn. Since I was a boy I have done nothing but fight against this same Pope, who was said to be false and now apparently turns out all right. Well, I hardly know what to think of it all."

Marco composed his lips into a gloomy smile, and then replied:

"You ought to be grateful to those vile Ghibellines for having thrust us by force on the right road. Do you know it is this very Pope who has opened voluntarily his arms to me? who has promised me the troops of the Church to help me to conquer my paternal dominions? And do not believe that I should confide blindly in a man who has always been my enemy. I trust in the force of circumstances to constrain him to ally himself with me for his safety. The power of the Bavarian is diminishing from day to day; many of his partizans, outlawed, crushed, betrayed by him, and abandoning his banner. Milan is still faithful to him, but I can make her rebel. The Milanese are beginning to understand at last on which side are justice and faith; they are tired out of the interdict."

"But, notwithstanding what you say," replied Ottorino, "the city is still quite full of preachers who go through the streets and squares gathering audiences, and crying out all manner of abuse of Giovanni XXII.; I heard one just now, close here, who was spouting out

big words, saying he was a murderer, a sorcerer, and plenty more."

"Well, you will soon hear another story."

"And what will that be?"

"You will hear preaching against Niccolo, and in favour of Giovanni."

"I can hardly believe you. It would be too barefaced."

"You see," said Marco, with a confiding gesture, "that the Pope has given leave to some few priests to go back into the district, in order to help me in my enterprise, without they themselves knowing or suspecting it; I shall direct them secretly, with the help of the Abbot of S. Vittore, and this very day they are beginning to spread abroad to bring wanderers into the fold."

"But if Azzone lays his hands on the first who appears, and silences him?" asked Ottorino.

"He won't do that; he fears the people too much; and if he did it, he would repent it. Out of their blood would arise many to revenge them. Do you believe they are afraid of death? What is death, after all? Did we not risk it many times on the field of battle for a little land, for a mere name, for a childish caprice? and for him who has in view an eternal reward?" But here he stopped, lowered his head, and remained silent for a few moments. When he looked up his excitement had disappeared; and turning to his cousin with an indifferent and somewhat sneering manner, he continued thus: "And after all, Avignon has already made so many martyrs in order to crush me, that they might as well make a few to set me on my feet again; but you are not going to have scruples?"

"You don't think I should? And besides, you know I am only a weapon in your hand."

"And I put full trust in it, for I know well its fine temper. I must tell you now what has been agreed upon with our cousin Lodrisio; he will begin to arm his vassals under pretence of giving assistance at a time of need to his brother, the Abbot of San Ambrogio, who

is sending troops to Limonta to punish those peasants for their revolt: as you have come from thence, of course, you know all about it."

"Thoroughly, and I must say I am really sorry for those poor mountaineers, who only escaped by the hair of their heads, and if it could be——"

"What would you have? It is a fancy of the Abbot Cardinal, and now we have so much upon us!"

"And I am also annoyed," pursued the youth, "that Count del Balzo, who lives close there, should have to suffer inconvenience."

"Oh, by-the-bye, tell me something of that Count; is he still as great a chatterbox as he was as a young fellow?"

"Poor man!" answered Ottorino, not being able to say no, and not wishing to say yes.

"And Ermelinda, his wife, did you see her?"

"Undoubtedly I did. I stayed a fortnight under her roof; she is an angel of goodness!"

Marco rose to his feet, and walked a few steps up and down the room, and then continued—"And Beatrice resembles her?"

"She is her mother all over, without a hair's difference."

"You wrote great things of her to me from Varenna. Do you know that man you sent me—what's his name—Pelagrua? I have placed him in my castle of Rosati; he seems to me an active fellow, and may be of use to me. One thing more I must tell you, that your great praise of Beatrice does not please me over-much; it looks like disloyalty to the daughter of Franchino Rusconi, who, they say, is mad about you; and, in short, I want this connection confirmed soon; it will make Como decidedly ours."

Ottorino answered not a word.

"Another thing comes into my head; tell me, is your Count del Balzo as frantic a Guelph as he used to be when he was a boy?"

"More than ever, I should say."

"Then make him come to Milan," said Marco; "in

these times a wealthy gentleman, of an illustrious family, who always must be talking, whether on the right or the wrong side, who delights in dabbling in law and decrees, and has always been Guelph down to his very marrow, why he is sent to us from heaven: you must do your best to make him come."

"The fact is, that he would have too many scruples, and he leads such a quiet life among his mountains."

"You may also say of him, if I judge him rightly, that he would be afraid of trusting himself in a city given up to Ghibellinism; well, conquer that fear by a greater one, and tell him that a band of savages are going off to Limonta, and will do devil's work there; that the Abbot of San Ambrogio is convinced that he favoured the revolt of his vassals; in short, scare him from his nest, and make him take flight hither."

"I should not like," answered Ottorino, hesitating, "to be the cause of his incurring any risk."

"How timid you have become, cousin," said Marco, fixing his eyes on his face; "how tender you are of the comfort of your friend! To set matters right, I will tell you, that if he comes here all will go well with him, if not, I can't say as much; it is quite true that the Abbot is more out of sorts with him than with the rest of them, the soldiers who are going there are told that in the castle are money and goods; so that he had better be wise, and choose the course that is for his own interests."

Here he was silent, as if he had nothing more to say, and did not wish anything more to be said to him; so that Ottorino, with a respectful bow, took his leave and departed.

As he went away through the hall, where he had left his squire, a sudden calm took place in an uproar which had been going on, the attendants and soldiers saluted respectfully the cousin of their Lord, and Lupo followed him out.

"What was all that noise?" Ottorino asked him, when they were on the staircase.

"Oh, nothing," answered Lupo, "it was only Belle-

buono, a soldier of your cousin Lodrisio, who, not knowing that I came from Limonta, began, while he was prating and drinking in their usual way, to say nasty things of my countrymen."

"And what did that unlicked cub say?"

"He said they were heretics and cowards—in short, any amount of abuse; and that he was commissioned to do their business for them, and he meant to make one over as a prey to each of the sixty lancers who would be with him, keeping back ten for his own amusement."

"The foul-mouthed fellow!" said Ottorino; "he is like the sheriff's bell, which only rings when there's anything disgraceful going on; and you swallowed it all?"

"I answered him that the trade of executioner suited him exactly, that his face and manners were just made for it, but as for laying his hand on one of my mountaineers, he would burn his fingers; then one word brings on another, we got hot, so that at last I hit him a blow which gave him a black eye, and made him make as much noise as if I had knocked him down."

"You are too hasty with your hands, my boy."

"It is true, I own I was wrong; but who could have restrained themselves? it was enough to provoke a maimed man to strike him, and I should have lost all respect for myself, and I am sure they would at home, if I had not given him a small taste of my feelings."

"Well, well, I agree with you; but do you want to do anything more to him?"

"And so," concluded Lupo, "if we meet at Limonta —if an ill-wind takes him there—I will give him the remainder."

Before long they did meet there, and Lupo kept his word. In due time we will accompany him there ourselves; now we must go there alone, to return to the Conte del Balzo.

About this time a messenger from Milan came to see him, with whom he had a long secret interview; then he told his wife in a summary manner that they must return at once to the city, and the whole family soon

began to busy themselves with the preparations for departure. Ermelinda was stupefied at this unexpected resolve, but tried in vain to find out the reason of it.

A discussion then arose as to what route they should take. She proposed to follow the shore of the lake as far as Lecco, and thence go on to Milan, for there was a sort of regular road; a kind of natural hollow way, very muddy, and which in many parts was a mere soft ditch, into which a man would sink to his horse's belly, like most roads were in those times—yet with all that, the best there was to be found. But the Count, after the fright he had experienced at that unlucky rock of Morcate, was in mortal terror of lakes and boats, like that felt by a young toper of wine and wine-bottles the day after a debauch, and would not hear a word of it, so it was settled that they were to go by the small mountain paths by the Valessina to Canzo, Inverigo, and so on to Milan.

This route also had its difficulties, not to speak of the risk the horses ran of injury up and down the uneven and ruinous bridle roads, and what was still worse, the chance of being robbed by the little country proprietors, for in those days every little squire who had half-a-dozen cut-throats in his pay, made war on his own account, and failing other methods, took to the highways, like Rinier da Corneto and Rinier Pazzo mentioned in Dante. Wretched times! when people had not yet got to understand that in some cases mischief will arise from very slight causes; just as a draught of air, from a crevice that you can hardly draw a thread through, will give you rheumatism, a cold in the head, or inflammation of the lungs, and perhaps send you into the other world; but if you face it in the open plain it gives back your health and strength.

The Count and his family set off at an early hour, with a train of about twenty persons. As they proceeded up and down the winding mountain tracts, at one time they threaded their way along the unequal curves of a valley, at another they crossed the bed of a dried-up torrent strewed with white pebbles, while at

another they disappeared in green groves of olive, bay, and myrtle trees. Not unfrequently the view of the lake was hidden from their sight by some intervening obstacle; but, again, on attaining some higher summit than the rest, and turning their backs on the mountain, or emerging from some plantation, it suddenly reappeared, sometimes clear and open, and sometimes like a picture in a setting of green foliage; and with ever varying peeps of bays, promontories, and boats leaving long streaks on the glassy surface, which also reflected the images of the cottages and pretty towns on its shores.

Beatrice, who felt more than she had ever done before, leaving for the first time in her life so many loved objects, turned her thoughts, with a joy mingled with dread, towards that future which she was approaching, and ever and anon cast back her eyes towards the old tower of her father's castle, as if to wish it farewell, having a strange presentiment that she should never see it again.

When our travellers arrived at the Bridge of Malpensata, over the Lambro, they met two Vassena fishermen, who on their return from Monza with the money produced by their week's fishing, had been robbed in that neighbourhood. One of them, after relating his misfortune, told the Count he had had a letter for him in his doublet, which the robbers had carried off with the clothes.

"From whom was it?" asked the Count.

"I don't know," replied the fisherman; "but your falconer's son gave it me in the Monza market-place."

"What! Was Lupo at Monza?"

"Yes; along with that knight, that handsome young man, who stayed so long at your castle."

Beatrice shuddered all over, but made no display of her distress; but when the cavalcade resumed its journey, she said to her mother, pointing to the two fishermen—

"Poor people! they have no bread for their children. Shall I give them something?"

"Do so, in God's name; it will be a real act of charity."

The young girl then took a piece of gold from her purse, and gave it to the one who had spoken to them.

"Divide it between you," she said, "and pray God for us."

The last time we spoke of Ermelinda and Beatrice, the mother was upbraiding her daughter for having gone out hunting against her wish, and the headstrong girl had answered with defiance. But she could not hold out long against Ermelinda's remonstrances, that were made more in sorrow than anger, and the second day after Ottorino's departure she burst into tears, and told her how she had been induced to disobey her mother contrary to her intention, she could scarcely say how it had happened; and at last she showed her the letter she had found between the pages of the Dante.

Ermelinda read it. In it Ottorino confessed that he had made some sort of promise of marriage to the daughter of Franchino Rusconi, but that he did not think he had gone so far as not to be able to withdraw honourably from the engagement. Henceforth, however, he was resolved to have no one but Beatrice, and he hoped she would excuse the liberty he had taken of writing to her before consulting her parents, assuring her that he would do so as soon as he knew that his suit was favoured by herself.

Ermelinda promised her daughter most affectionately that she would do all in her power to please her; but warned her against being too confident, as it was possible that it would not be quite so easy as the young man thought to withdraw from the business, which had been concocted by Marco, who was of a haughty nature and unused to contradiction, and who, besides, had other grudges against their family. In short, she advised her to let her manage the affair, which the girl agreed to do, and promised implicit obedience.

Thus the mother's affection for her daughter was entirely restored, and now they were conversing on the journey as familiarly as usual.

But the Count, whose curiosity had been excited by

the fishermen, began to wonder what could be the contents of the letter in question.

"You may depend," he said, "there has been some disturbance at Milan, and Ottorino wanted to advise me not to set foot there at present. But who knows?"

So saying, he ordered the cavalcade to leave the direct road, and turned off to Monza, hoping to find Ottorino there, and to have some talk with him before coming to any definite conclusion.

CHAPTER IX.

THEY arrived at the Piazza di S. Giovanni di Monza about vesper-tide, and found a large crowd assembled round a priest, who was preaching vigorously from a bench. The people, on seeing the approach of the cavalcade, left the preacher and swarmed round the new comers to see who they were, whence they came, and whither they were going, so that our travellers soon found themselves the centre of a crowd of curious questioners. Ermelinda, who saw the church was open, and wished to escape from the turmoil, said to her husband:

"We ladies will wait inside the church while you are looking for Ottorino; but let us start again as soon as we can, so as to reach Milan, if possible, before nightfall."

"Do you mean to go into a church in time of interdict?" replied the Count; but this was said *sotto voce*, as not knowing what opinions the rabble around them might have on that point, he did not care to run the risk of being insulted.

His wife, however, who made light of such scruples, took her daughter's arm, and beckoning to Lauretta, her mother Mariana, and the falconer to come with them, they all passed through the crowd into the Church of San Giovanni.

They found the high altar decorated as usual; the lamps and candles were lit, and the canons were singing in the choir as in ordinary times; for in Monza, as at Milan, the clergy were all for anti-pope Nicholas V., and as they considered John XXII. to have been legally deposed, they did not care about his interdict.

Ermelinda hesitated for a moment about going in,

fearing to incur excommunication for attending a service conducted by schismatic priests during the interdict.

"However," she said to herself, "any how I am only come here for shelter, as I would to a house or under a portico."

So without bowing to the altar or crossing herself, she sat down on a bench, with her daughter by her side.

At this, Lauretta's mother, being deeply imbued with the principles of another of her sons called Bernardo, who had picked up a few fine phrases from a schismatic monk of San Ambrogio, was filled with indignation; she gave her daughter's gown a tug, who, seeing her betters sitting down, wanted to do the same, and made her kneel down by her side. She then cast a withering glance at her husband, who was standing up with his hands behind his back, and amusing himself with contemplating the sibyls and prophets depicted on the cornice of the church, and, at last, unable longer to contain herself, she began muttering between her teeth:

"A nice way to go on in church! Just as if you were in a stable, more shame to you!"

"Be quiet, or the mistress will hear you," whispered Lauretta.

"I won't be quiet, so you had better cross yourself and say a prayer or two; and there's your father standing and staring like an owl at the ceiling!"

"Come, do have done with it," said the daughter; "say another prayer or two, if you like, but do not be long about it."

"I won't have done with it; it's a shame to see Christians stand about in church like that. If you had only heard what your brother said yesterday! I say if you had only heard it; but people don't want to listen."

Her daughter, seeing that if she said anything more she would only irritate her mother, resolved to be quiet and let her cool down, which soon took place, as the old lady kept up a little low muttering for a short time and then was silent altogether.

Meantime Beatrice was all in a flutter; but whether through hope or fear of seeing herself so soon in com-

pany with Ottorino, it is impossible to say. Every time she heard the church-door open and shut behind her she thought it must be he, and felt her face grow crimson, and trembled all over. Hearing a noise as if of approaching footsteps, she fancied she could distinguish between her father's step and the well-known one of somebody else; while her breathing became laboured, and her heart felt as if it would have leapt out of her body. Meantime the persons she had heard coming had arrived, and brushed close by her as they passed on. It was not he—then she recovered her breath, and raised her head again, only, however, to renew her palpitations and tremblings every time she heard the door slam and saw fresh persons pass by her.

Just then the monotonous alternate chant of the priests in the choir was drowned by a tremendous clatter on the square outside. The people in the church turned round to listen, and some few got up and went out. The canons were silent for a moment, till one of them came out and looked down the church, when, seeing all seemed quiet, he went back to the choir and the chanting recommenced. Suddenly the church doors were thrown open, and a huge wave of people, armed with sticks and stones, poured into the edifice with a tremendous roar, like a river that had burst its banks.

At their head was the priest who had been preaching in the square; an emaciated old man, with long hair flying in the wind, holding a crucifix in his left hand and a sword in his right, who called out with a voice of thunder, that was heard far above the roar of the crowd: "Away schismatics! away children of Belial—priests of Moloch!" And the surging crowd took up the cry, shouting out: "Away schismatics! away heretics! out with you!" and rushed about breaking benches, throwing stones at the elaborate stained glass in the windows, tearing off the altar-cloths, and upsetting chandeliers and crucifixes, and everything else they could find. The high altar and its contents soon became an undistinguishable mass of ruin and devastation; whilst some of the madmen rushed into the choir, dragged the canons from

the stalls, and drove them out with showers of kicks and cuffs. Some might be seen rolling down the altar-steps, others dragged along by the hair, whilst surplices, chasubles, birettas, and breviaries were flying about in all directions.

The person who had set the storm in motion, seeing his object was accomplished, got on a table, and began preaching afresh, praising the mob for their exploits, but exhorting them now to cease their work of destruction. However, his preaching was no good, for no one would listen to him, and the people kept running about the church as if it were a town taken by assault; and now the bolder spirits got into the sacristy, where they smashed in the wardrobe-doors, and dragging out the church vestments and plate, they divided it amongst the clamorous crowd like common plunder.

Their ill-advised leader now rushed in—"My brethren," he cried, "ye have just accomplished a blessed work, why will ye mar it by sacrilege? put down those things at once."

"They are excommunicated as well," replied a wag, "we must drive them out of church:" whereat the mob began to cheer.

Here the preacher, seeing a sturdy young man fighting for the possession of a chalice, hidden under his cloak, confronted him, and cried out, "In the name of the spiritual and temporal power, set forth by this crucifix and this sword, I command thee, O most wicked man, to turn back."

But the man, giving him a blow in the face that made him spin round like a teetotum, rejoined, "And I, in the name of this authority here present, command thee to let me go on."

"So you have now got a taste of your two potentates, eh?" exclaimed another ruffian; on which the priest who had been struck became white with rage, and invoked the curse of Heaven in every form on those wretches, who let him go on for a while, but then overwhelmed him with blows, cuffs, and kicks, and at last drove him out of the church in a very sorry plight.

Meanwhile, another still more strange scene was enacting outside. Bernardo, the falconer's son, who had come from Limonta with the cavalcade, on first entering the gates of Monza, had stumbled upon an old acquaintance with whom he stayed behind for some time, so that when he got to the square of San Giovanni, he came in for the disturbance we have been describing. Seeing some priests running out of the church all torn and bleeding, he inquired the reason, and learnt that they were the canons of the church who had been driven out in that way for their obstinacy in carrying on the services in spite of the interdict. "What!" said he to himself, "can a place that has always been for Nicholas V. and the good cause, have been guilty so suddenly of such excesses?" He could not believe it was more than a momentary outbreak, which he had good hopes of being able to appease. Blinded with indignation and self-confidence, he resolved on a course of action here that he would never have dreamt of at Limonta, where, as he said, all were a set of hardened schismatics, and where consequently there was no good to be done. So, dressed as he was in a cuirass over his doublet and a steel helmet overshadowing his pale, foolish countenance, he jumped on a bench, javelin in hand, and, looking like a scarecrow, began to harangue the mob.

This well-meaning fellow was just setting to work, when he saw, coming out of San Giovanni, the priest who had stirred up all this tempest and then was not man enough to calm it. Our friend Bernardo, however, meeting him in this wretched plight, and pursued by a yelling mob, thought he must be one of the canons who had been so maltreated; so leaving his bench, he went towards the wretched man and kissed his garments. One of the crowd, who saw the mistake, cried out that this priest was not a canon of Monza; but the very man who had brought all this ill-treatment on them. Bernardo drew back in dismay, exclaiming, "Then I have been kissing a venomous serpent whom I mistook for a dove."

"You are, yourself, a snake, a dragon, a basilisk,"

cried the priest in a louder key, "an abettor of schism and heresy."

So these two began to abuse each other to the utmost pitch of their voices, neither being willing to yield, while the populace laughed and cheered them on. At last, one of the rogues gave the falconer's son a tremendous push from behind, and threw him to the ground with his legs in the air, amidst the yells and cheers of the spectators.

But now a voice was heard, which stopped the clamour at once. "Make way there; let us pass." It was Ottorino, who had arrived on horseback with about thirty soldiers, in company with Count del Balzo.

At the approach of this cavalcade the rabble dispersed, scattering in all directions. Lupo, who was by the side of his master, soon recognized his brother—who was shaking the dirt off his garments, and picking up his helmet—and said to him, "Why don't you hold your tongue and keep quiet?"

"If you had come up a minute before," answered Bernardo, "you might have lent me your arm."

"You wanted me rather to lend you some brains," replied Lupo.

Meanwhile, Ottorino, with his followers, had entered the church, and galloping up and down the aisles, and in and out of the chapels—not omitting the sacristy and the choir—by dint of frequent blows with the flat of their swords and the butt end of their lances, drove out the plundering mob who had taken possession of the place.

Our ladies, whom we left in the church when the first wave of people entered, had taken refuge in a chapel, and the active falconer had fastened the bolts to ensure their safety while the church was being sacked. Every now and then one of the mob would come swaggering up, and try to make them open the chapel gates, but Ambrose drew his rapier and applied it freely to the hands of all whom he could not persuade to go away quietly. At the same time he told his daughter to remove from the altar the candlesticks and crucifix, and everything that could tempt the mob to break into their

place of refuge, and Lauretta promptly obeyed, in spite of her mother's protestations, who would rather have suffered martyrdom than taken part in such profanation.

Here they remained shut up for a while, until, by good luck, some of the Count's suite, who had got into the church, caught sight of the ladies, and stationed themselves in front of the chapel gates, with their swords drawn, at the sight of which the plunderers did not care to attack them further.

We are sorry to have detained our readers so long over such foolish and profane proceedings; but we hope we shall not be thought to have dealt too lightly with such matters. In our description of one of the excesses of those sad times, which was, however, by no means of the worst type, we have tried to place it in as graphic a form as possible, and to leave with them the same impression as we have derived from the writings of the time, not adding any reflection of our own, but preferring that each reader should draw his own conclusions.

The Count and his family and suite now pursued their journey to Milan; and Ottorino, who had nothing more to do at Monza, proposed, as was natural, to accompany them.

"I assure you that I have not written you any other letter than the one you received at Limonta by my servant," said the young knight to the father of Beatrice, as he rode beside him.

"And yet," replied the Count, "those fishermen of Vassena declared, as I told you, that they had a letter of yours given them by Lupo in the market-place of Monza."

Lupo was summoned, and owned that he had sent the letter himself to warn his father to secure his own safety; he had got it written by a priest of his acquaintance at Monza, and had given it to these very two fishermen.

"Ah! now I understand," said the Count; and continued conversing with the young knight in an under

tone. "Tell me," he asked him, "what was it you wrote to me? that the Abbot of San Ambrogio——"

"He is quite beside himself;" said Ottorino, "and I have just heard at Monza that to-night, at Lecco, the sixty lances are to embark whom he is sending to exterminate the poor Limontese."

"Mercy on us! but what have I to do with it? It was not my fault that those pig-headed hill-folk would not submit to their lord!"

"What would you have me say? The Cardinal seems to be against you."

"Oh, what bad luck! I have done nothing, I tell you again. They say I protected them. I tell you that I have never betrayed one word of your letter, and have never repeated what your messenger said."

"Do you mean that they know nothing at Limonta of their peril?"

"Nothing whatever."

"If so, we must at once send off to inform them," said the youth.

"For pity's sake, forbear! If they catch a messenger on his way down there we shall never get out of the Cardinal's head that I've sent him, and as he already suspects me——"

But Ottorino, without listening to him, said to his squire:

"It is only proper that you should go off at once to Limonta to warn your fellow-country people of the storm about to break on them; so turn back at once, find a fresh horse at Monza, and go off."

"No, no," interrupted the Count, "you will ruin me. The Abbot knows that Lupo is the son of my servant."

"He is my squire," answered Ottorino; "so I take it on myself."

"But think for a moment," continued the Count. "By this time they know all."

"Did you not tell me that they guess nothing?"

"That is to say—I cannot be sure—but most likely they have been warned from Lecco. Oh, they must have been; I'll warrant they have been."

"At all events, it is better to make sure of it," replied the young knight.

"It is so dark for poor Lupo, among all those precipices," the Count went on urging.

"Do not let that enter your head," said the falconer's son. "I will leave the horse at the first cottage when night overtakes me, and will go on on foot. It will only be a dozen miles for me to trot, and as it concerns the lives of these poor people, that's nothing," and so saying, he turned his horse round, and galloped off.

Then Ottorino, approaching Ermelinda, told her what had just happened, and explained to her the cause of Lupo's sudden departure. He afterwards tried to turn the conversation to her daughter, so as to oblige her to take part in it; but Beatrice would neither open her lips nor turn her eyes towards him. Her mother also, after she had listened to everything concerning Limonta, appeared to wish to end the conversation, and answered as shortly and coldly as common civility would permit.

The young man, discouraged by this behaviour, fell a prey to many confused suspicions.

"Could Beatrice not have received my letter? can she disdain my love? does not the connection please her mother? can they have arranged another match for her?"

In order to settle these doubts as soon as possible, he drew the Count away from the rest of the party, and began with much courtesy to speak to him of his daughter, and gradually led up to the point of a direct offer of marriage. The father of the young lady began a speech full of eulogiums on the family and person of the youth; but at the end began to stammer out that he would not on any account give offence to Marco, who, as he had been told by his wife, was arranging another marriage.

Ottorino answered, that he was confident of the approval of Marco, who, in the affair only wished his good, but that in any case he was his own master, and for all the respect he owed his leader, he was neither his vassal nor his son, and could marry whomsoever he wished, whether Marco was willing or not.

On hearing this the Count made a grimace, which meant, "My dear friend,—you may do as you like, but I do not wish, for my part, to break my head by ramming it against a stone wall." With his lips, however, he only replied in this way, "Well, we will speak of it again presently, when more at leisure."

But the youth, who perceived the untoward impression left by his last words, tried quickly to rectify it, and declared that when Marco was made aware that she, for whom Ottorino was ready to run all risks, was the daughter of Count Oldrado del Balzo, he would not dream of any opposition. He also proceeded to relate how Visconti had asked for him, and manifested a great desire to see him at Milan, where matters appeared to be turning in favour of Pope John XXII. In the end he left the Count with a sort of half-notion that Marco attributed a great part of the credit which he had obtained to the influence of the Count.

I need not say that the effect of these words was to make our friend still more vain and conceited, if possible. The worthy man, like most boasters, was not in the habit of hearing himself praised by others, and his face was now covered with complacent smiles, beaming, so to speak, with that sort of self-satisfied expression which most people, lest they should appear inordinately vain, try hard to smother and suppress. But it was no such thing with the Count; on the contrary, his gratified vanity seemed to manifest itself in every feature, as if purposely to mar and destroy the effect of this moment of legitimate triumph.

"I must say," replied the Count, at last, "that Marco does me more honour than I deserve; but, however, as I told you before, we were friends from boyhood. At any rate, if I am of any value I am here entirely for his sake. And as to what relates to Beatrice, I say again, that if there are no objections on his part, I will promise her to you at once, and think myself lucky to marry her in so honourable a manner, and so much after my own heart, for you know how fond I am of you, and how anxious I am for your welfare; and as for Erme-

linda, she is just the same, and will, I know, rejoice greatly."

The party arrived in time at Milan: the Count turned off to dismount at the Brera del Guercio, where his house was, and the young knight went straight to Marco Visconti.

CHAPTER X.

AS soon as Marco saw Ottorino enter the room, where he sat alone reading some papers, he rose, and hastening cordially to meet him: "Already returned!" he said, "and how go affairs at Monza?"

"There is universal discontent," answered the youth; "but no one dares to stir a finger for fear of the Duke of Tech."

"Whom then did you communicate with?" said Marco.

"With the heads of the Guelph party, whom you mentioned to me, such as Guzino Gavazza, Moneghino Zeva, and Berusio Rabbia; the latter, as soon as he can, without being suspected, will come to Milan to confer with you."

"And what news can you give me of the populace?"

"The worst possible: I must tell you of your priest, Martino, whom you sent there as a missionary; it was only by a miracle that he escaped alive from the claws of those worthies, whom he had began to instruct."

"Are they so mad for the Antipope, Niccolo?"

"It is not that they care more for Niccolo than Giovanni; they are a lawless set, who only care to fish in troubled waters;" and here Ottorino related all that had happened in the church of Monza.

"Brutes!" said Marco, smiling at the account of their valiant deeds. "Brutes! but it is always the same everywhere; well, enough of that. My cue is first to thoroughly entangle matters, and then we can set them right again after a time. And now for poor Martino——"

"I give you my word that he has lost all wish to preach, and that he will bear the marks of his adventures for a good time."

"However," replied Marco, "to say the truth, he has played his part rather stupidly; but one need not live to be a hundred to know that when the mob rises they are like wild beasts, and that they will lay their hands on what they can get. Let them alone. After all, there is no very great harm that there should fall into the pockets of poor folk, in the shape of gold pieces, some of that gold and silver which is always being heaped up in the sacristies in the shape of candelabras and crucifixes. Why cannot we be good Christians, and, at the same time, have lamps made of glass or of earthenware, and crosses and candlesticks of wood? And after all, where has all this gold and silver come from, I ask you? why, out of the pockets of the poor. The only thing that really matters is, whether they are not over-much attached to the schismatic side?"

"As to that, you may be at ease, for in my opinion they know nothing about either Pope or Antipope; and to prove it, after having ill-treated poor Martino, who was preaching for Giovanni against Niccolo, they began to do the same to a second orator, who raised his voice for Niccolo against Giovanni. He was a mountaineer, who had come from Limonta with Count del Balzo, and if I had not come up in time, there would soon have been an end of him."

"And has Count del Balzo arrived?"

"We arrived together, just now."

"You see that the receipt I suggested to you has had the right effect: now that he is here, it will be my fault if we don't turn him to account; we must begin—let me see—he has all his family with him, has he not?"

"Yes, all the family."

"To-morrow I am going to give my friends a banquet, can you not arrange to bring him with you? Ermelinda—I certainly cannot hope to see her; but—this Beatrice, whom you rave about, you may be able to persuade her to keep her father company."

Ottorino, who could have asked for nothing better, since it was clear that if his patron was so anxious to see his lady-love, he would pardon him without hesitation

for throwing over Rusconi's daughter, promised at once to obey him implicitly.

The next morning, early, he went to the Count to tell him that Marco expected to see him and Beatrice at dinner, and that he must let her go, for it was a great feather in his cap, and a favour that would greatly increase his reputation in Milan, and in a word, that there was no way out of it.

Ermelinda, to whom the Count announced this matter as a settled affair, saw no way of opposing it. The girl might fairly be called Ottorino's betrothed, as he had formally demanded her hand; and it was only natural and proper that the young man should wish to introduce her to his patron to gain his consent to the alliance, as it was very important that the former engagement, in which Marco had a hand, should not be broken off without his full consent. All the same she could not help feeling a secret dread, derived from memories of the past and forebodings for the future, at the idea of her daughter being presented to Marco; and when she finally gave Beatrice leave to go, who was also a good deal alarmed from all she had heard of that personage, she felt that she was sealing irrevocably her daughter's future destiny; and when she saw her start her eyes filled with tears.

Marco Visconti was standing in one of the reception rooms of his palace, in the midst of a circle of the flower of Milanese knighthood, waiting the announcement of dinner. Ever magnificent in his entertainments to his friends and fellow nobles, on this occasion he had pushed things almost to prodigality in order to attract partizans, and to flaunt his wealth before the eyes of the crowd, so easily dazzled by all that glistens.

We learn from the chronicles that, in the sumptuousness of his banquets, the magnificence of his dress, and his horses, and in the number of his pages, attendants, and squires, he far surpassed even his nephew Azzone, the lately created Lord of Milan.

One of the chief personages in his following was Lodrisio Visconti, brother of the usurping abbot of

Saint Ambrogio, Marco's most trusted counsellor, and his instigator in the many secret transactions he had been mixed up in. He was a fine-looking, powerful man of about forty, but a turbulent, restless spirit, who, although he had been hitherto well spoken of, yet was afterwards destined to acquire a very disreputable celebrity. He had long hated Ottorino, from jealousy of seeing him beloved by Marco, over whose spirit he wished to rule alone, and also on account of certain lawsuits he had had with the young knight, relations though they were, relating to the succession to the fief of Castelletto, on the Ticino, which had at last been adjudged to Ottorino. Marco had sought to reconcile them: and lately they had seemed to be on better terms. Lodrisio, however, had not laid aside his old ill-feeling, and was always on the watch to take advantage of an opportunity to ruin his rival.

A page now announced the arrival of Count del Balzo; all eyes turned to the door, and he was seen to enter holding his daughter's hand. Marco hastened to meet them quite agitated; for at the first sight of Beatrice, who came forward with her eyes cast down, and deeply blushing, he imagined that he saw her mother, Ermelinda, herself again, and his heart for a moment stood still.

He gave no sign, however, of his feelings; received the father with courtesy, but with a dignified mien, which, though cordial, could not fail of inspiring respect, and to the daughter he paid every honour that was due to a noble damsel, entertaining her with gay talk till the pages entered to announce that the tables were ready. They then passed into an adjoining hall, where Marco placed Beatrice on his right, and the Count del Balzo on his other side, and all the party took their places round the table.

We do not intend to dwell upon the arrangements of this banquet, which, although not quite so sumptuous as those that are given at great public festivities, yet was one that, in our times, would not have disgraced the most luxurious Courts in Europe.

Suffice it to say that there was a grand display of the finest tablecloths and napkins, set off with fringe and embroidery; wine glasses, with the Visconti serpent engraved upon them; all sorts of costly vessels; glittering gold and silver plate; provisions of every kind of the most exquisite flavours and colours; gilded fish; peacocks, carefully decked in their own plumage, and so skilfully set up as almost to appear alive, which, in an instant, were stripped by the carvers and smoked on the board; all sorts of game and venison; and a young bear, with its fur skilfully imitated in silver, with claws and teeth of gold, and a light in its mouth. After every course, scented water was handed to the guests, and the most exquisite wines were poured from large cups, chased in gold and silver, into elegant wine glasses engraved with flowers, animals, and lace patterns.

Towards the end of dinner, there entered the hall twelve valets in doublets and parti-coloured red and white hosen, bearing the gifts of the festival. Some held braces of greyhounds, setters, or bloodhounds, with collars of quilted velvet, with couples and leashes of stamped leather. Another bore on his fist splendid hawks of different kinds, trained for the chase, with red jesses, white straps and caps embroidered with pearls, and little bells and silver ornaments on their breasts, engraved with the serpent crest. Another had a golden-hilted sword; another a steel helmet: while others bore aloft mantles and surcoats of embroidered damask, with silken cords, choice pearl buttons, and golden tassels.

When these pages approached with the presents, Marco perceived that there was nothing fit to be presented to a young lady of noble birth, so he made a sign to one of his squires, who left the hall for a moment, and then reappeared, bearing a coronet of pearls on a salver. Then the master of the feast stood up, and taking the coronet in both his hands, bent one knee before Beatrice, and then rising, placed the chaplet gently on her head, saying, "God save the Queen of the Feast," and all the guests responded with a shout of applause.

This done, he begged the young lady to condescend,

to use his own words, to lend a grace to these poor gifts of his, by presenting them with her own hands to the knights and barons who had honoured him with their company. Beatrice then stood up, and all the guests followed her example. Marco himself, acting as her squire, led her round the different tables, and as he received them from the hands of the pages, handed her the presents, one by one, which she, with a graceful gesture, presented to each in turn, while the recipient welcomed the gift on bended knee, kissing the hem of the fair donor's garment. There fell to Ottorino's lot a steel helmet with an enamelled crest, and it was remarked that the hand of the beautiful queen trembled more than usual when she offered it to him; but it was supposed that the weight of the armour was too much for the delicate wrist of a young lady.

The last to receive a present was Count del Balzo, for whom Marco had reserved a superb peregrin falcon. He, too, received it on bended knee from the hands of his daughter, and kissed the hem of her garment like the rest; but on rising, he could not restrain the warmth of his paternal affection, and throwing his arms round her neck, kissed her forehead, saying, "God bless thee, my daughter!" at which another loud cheer rang through the hall.

When quiet was restored, Marco said to the damsel:

"Most lovely and courteous queen, must I be the only one among all your subjects who has to go without one of your favours? If it is not too much to ask for, might I hope to receive from your hands a ribbon, or any trifle, as a sign, that you have accepted me for your vassal?"

The maiden became quite confused, and almost frightened; but her father said to her:

"Quick, take something off at once—one of those bracelets."

She obeyed; and drew off her left wrist a silk armlet embroidered with gold, which Marco received from her hands on his knees.

When the tables had been cleared, the company divided into different groups, and began discussing the news of

the day. The conversation turning on the Pope and Antipope, Count del Balzo soon monopolized the subject, and took the opportunity to air his Latin and to display all the ecclesiastical lore he had in his head; and those young knights, who could talk of little else than the merits of their swords and horses, were struck dumb by his extraordinary learning. But in the long run people become weary of the act of admiration, so that there is, perhaps, nothing that so soon becomes tiresome, particularly when the admiration has all to be taken on trust. The listeners at last realized that they also had tongues in their heads, and began, one by one, to drop off from the group surrounding the orator, so at last the audience was reduced to three or four, and even these, at the first time the Count stopped to take breath, took the opportunity to disappear (politely), and crossed over to another circle, composed of all the deserters from the first.

Here the talk was of a tournament which was announced that day to celebrate the election of Azzone Visconti as Imperial Viceroy. After many inquiries had been made and answered, Lodrisio, drawing a sheet of parchment from his breast—

"Here," he said, "is the proclamation as it has been set forth by the town-crier."

The guests all crowded round him, and he began to read:—

"'O yes, O yes, princes, lords, and gentlemen,—I declare to you the great, worthy, and noble contest of arms, the high festival and joust, which will be held at Milan, in Lombardy, a month from the date of these presents. To fly from sloth, to exercise our own persons, and to acquire honour in the military calling and the favour of the most lovely and high-born ladies whose servants we are, and, at the same time, to display the prowess of the city and the country, by reason of the institution of the magnificent and illustrious Azzone Visconti to the office of Imperial Viceroy, we, the undersigned noble knights, have undertaken to hold a combat and joust; whereat we will hold ourselves ready from sunrise to sun-

set to accept the challenge of any knight, whether native or foreign, who can show a proper qualification.

"'RULES OF THE TOURNAMENT.

"'*First assault*—On horseback in the lists, each knight to have four challenges with his lance, and one for his lady.

"'*Second assault*—Sword attack on horseback singly, in pairs, or all together, according to the good pleasure of the judges.

"'The armourers will furnish lances of equal length, and swords at the option of the combatants. If any strike a horse he shall be put out of the lists. Whoever breaks most lances, and does best, will have the prize of a suit of armour.

"'The combatants will be required to touch one or more of the shields suspended at the upper end of the lists at their option, or the whole number if they choose to do so, and they will find a herald to receive them and to enrol their names.

"'The combatants will be also required either to bring themselves, or to send by a squire to the said herald their shields, engraved with their proper coat-of-arms, to be suspended before the commencement of the joust, in the place above-mentioned, and in case they are not hung up by the time appointed, they will not be received without the special consent of the managers and of His Excellency the Imperial Viceroy.

"'In witness whereof we have hereto subscribed our names.'" Here the reader stopped.

"But how about the signatures?" cried several at once. "Let us see them."

"Well, here they are, then:—

"'SACRAMORO LIPRANDO,
"'OTTORINO VISCONTI,
"'BRONZIN CAIMO,
"'PINALA,
"'BERTONE CACATOSSICI,
"'PIETRO MERAVIGLIA,

"'Un Tanzo,
"'Due Biraghi,
"'Due Bossi,
"'Lorenzuolo da Landriano.

"'Given at Milan, in Lombardy, Anno Domini 1329. Month ——, day ——.'

"How much more do you want?"

The Count del Balzo, who, during the whole time of the banquet, had been utterly cowed by the innate stateliness of the aspect and demeanour of Marco, had done little else than return a few incoherent answers to the questions put to him from time to time by the master of the house. But now that he was no longer near him, and had, so to speak, passed out of the orbit of his influence, he felt inspirited again by the honour done to his daughter, and by the attention with which his first discourse had been listened to; so not being able to restrain himself any longer, as soon as he perceived that the reading of the proclamation was finished, he poked his head into the circle of young men who had been listening to it, and said: "So you are talking now of tournaments and jousts, are you?" in that form of interrogation which does not require an answer, and which is only a pretext for joining in a conversation already begun. "Do you know what the word joust means? Well, I'll tell you. Joust comes from juxta, the Latin for near, because it is a fight in which the combatants come close together."

"And who will be the judges of the lists?" asked one of the party, who did not seem to care much about this display of learning.

But the Count, without allowing time for the answer, went chattering on:—

"You see, too, the custom of jousting is very ancient indeed, it dates from the time of the Trojan War, and came again into fashion at the time of King Arthur and the Round Table, and this is why we call it 'Trojae ludus,' which means to say, the game of Troy, and also the War of Troy, because the Romans called war 'ludus,' as if it had been a game."

No one spoke, but the orator could not help perceiving from the looks and demeanour of his hearers that they did not take much pleasure in the study of etymology, and that therefore he had better change his subject; so he began to talk learnedly about arms and warfare, a subject to which the conversation seemed naturally tending. He then began furbishing up the most rusty old saws, about the proper mode of conducting oneself in a passage of arms, or in a joust, and laid down the law how the knight ought to stand up in his stirrups, and how he ought to lower and place his lance in rest, and how to manage it, and how to parry a sword-cut or a lance-thrust.

He then quoted various authors, and mentioned several cases in point, and in a word, tried his best to pass for a valiant jouster in the opinion of mere theorists, and for a learned professor in the eyes of skilled performers, such as the young men before him, who every now and then cast sly glances at one another, while laughing at the Count in their sleeves.

Such is the fate of those who always assume to know everything; they never have discretion or caution enough to keep to the subject best adapted to their auditors.

Marco had never stirred from Beatrice's side, with whom he conversed with easy cordiality. When, as it grew late, her father came to take a hearty and grateful farewell, he accompanied the damsel to the limits of the hall, where, leaving her in the Count's charge, he praised her to him inordinately, and made him a profusion of compliments, ending with saying, "That for the future he hoped that their frequent meetings would atone for the length of time during which they had been separated."

The Count left the palace in such high spirits that his feet seemed hardly to touch the ground. As soon as he arrived at home, he told his wife of the high honours that had been paid him and his daughter, and Ermelinda was much satisfied with the account, feeling sure that Ottorino had spoken about his intended marriage with Beatrice to Marco, and that the politeness shown by the latter to the Count and his daughter had been intended as a mark of his approval.

Soon after Ottorino himself arrived, in a high state of delight. The conversation, turning on the festivities of the day, he saw that the Count and Countess both considered that Marco had, in fact, given his consent, and he did not care to undeceive them. After the welcome he had received he thought himself sure of success, so he determined, the first opportunity he had of being alone with his liege lord, to do what he had been ashamed of doing before so large an assembly. He proceeded therefore to talk about his future nuptials with Beatrice's parents as if it were a settled affair, and, in fact, it took very few words to arrange everything.

The Count here made a sign to his wife, and then turning to Beatrice, who during the whole interview had remained silent, and had not even dared to raise her head—

"Look here," he said, with a half silly, half sly laugh, which he always gave when about to come out with some more than usually clever saying; "look here, we have all been reckoning without our host; we have been giving you away without asking your leave, when, perhaps, after all, all this nonsense is the last thing you are thinking of."

Beatrice on this felt her cheeks glow like a hot coal. She took her mother's hand, but did not answer a syllable.

Ermelinda made a sign to the Count to stop his jesting; and then said to Ottorino, with a smile:

"Though this kind of thing cannot generally be done at second hand, yet I hope you will be content with the 'yes' that her mother now gives you on her behalf."

The young knight then rose to take leave, on which the girl raised her head, and without letting go her mother's hand, said to him—

"You will come to-morrow, won't you?"

"Ha! ha! Now the cat is let out of the bag," said the Count, splitting with laughter; "now we see you in your true light! A minute ago you might have been a Santa Lucia. Oh, you little puss!"

Ottorino then went away in a state of great delight, which was thoroughly shared by those he left behind him.

CHAPTER XI.

A SILVER lamp, with three branches, was burning in Marco Visconti's private chamber, and diffused a sweet perfume all over the room. Lodrisio, seated on a faldstool, with one elbow leaning on a small table, and his chin resting on his hand, was conversing with the master of the house, who was listening with a distracted air, and as if immersed in his own thoughts.

"Of one thing we may be quite certain," said the astute counsellor, "the Duke of Monteforte has got hold of the 25,000 florins that Lewis of Bavaria has ordered your nephew, Azzone, to pay him to-day; and to-morrow he will start for the Tyrol with his German bodyguard, so as to get out of the way. The Emperor is waiting for him in Tuscany, expecting the money, and, my life for it, a pretty fool the dried-up old stick will look when he finds his Count has flown! But see what a master stroke it is to get rid of those fellows for a bit! Our schemes would not stand a chance of success unless that burden was off our backs!"

"Quite so," said Marco, listlessly.

"All the same," rejoined the other; "you were quite right in what you said this morning, that the plot is not yet ripe, and that the priests and friars sent by the Pope must have time allowed them to produce the requisite effect; and we must wait till the Bavarian is more thoroughly drained of men and money, which process is going on every day. By-the-bye, do you know, cousin, that the 800 German cavalry, who, we heard, had deserted their colours because their pay was not forthcoming, have intrenched themselves in the Castle of Ceruglio, in the Val di Nievole? Don't they know about it in the Viceregal Palace?"

Marco, whose head was turned in another direction, heard these last sentences like a man half-awake, whose ear catches the actual sound of the words, without his mind perceiving their meaning; and just like a person in a doze, if shaken by the speaker, manages in a kind of dreamy way to pick up the general meaning of what is said to him from the last words he hears. So Marco, from the word Ceruglio, the last sound of which he had dimly caught, and from the interrogative tone of Lodrisio's voice, guessed what he was talking about; and making believe that he had been listening all the time, answered—

"Oh, to be sure, those troops at Ceruglio—eh?"

"Yes," said the other, "have your brothers and the Viceroy heard anything about them?"

"They have been told about it by the Bavarian himself," replied Marco, "and the Emperor is trying to work upon my nephew, in order to get the investiture fees, with which he hoped to restore those rebellious troops to their allegiance."

"Oh, how ingenious! Precious few of them he will get hold of by that means, at any rate," rejoined the other.

"And do you know," continued Marco, "what Azzone wants to do? Can you believe it? To send *me* to Ceruglio instead of the money!"

"What!"

"Why, he wants me to go as hostage to the rebels to keep them quiet till he scrapes enough money together to pay them."

"What a dear boy!" said Lodrisio, with a grin.

"Isn't he?" replied Marco. "And this very morning he has been plaguing me again, saying that I was their only hope in this affair; that no one but myself could get him out of the mess, as those Germans knew me, and would trust my word; and then he talked of my various exploits."

"Your exploits—eh? You may tell him he has not yet seen the best of them. However, he is not such a fool as he looks. Any one can see he wants to get you

away from here, as he feels that your reputation quite throws him into the shade."

Marco smiled, and said, "Do you know what has come into my head in thinking over all this?"

"Pray tell me."

"Why, to catch him in his own toils. I will go myself to the Val di Nievole, and gain over to my side those eight hundred lancers, every one of whom would go through fire and water for me (my nephew was not wrong there) by paying them their arrears with my own money. I shall leave you here ready for action, and when the Bavarian comes to set that creature of his on his feet, I will swoop down upon him with my eight hundred spearmen from Ceruglio and the Tuscan contingent, which I shall have got together in the meantime."

Lodrisio sprang up, exclaiming—"Cousin, this plan is worth its weight in gold; we'll make our friend look foolish before we have done with it."

"That's enough, we will talk the matter over more carefully presently," said Marco. "I should not wonder if we were to make something out of it. But I am not much in the humour for going into it any more to-night. So good-bye till to-morrow."

"I tell you it is a wonderful idea," continued Lodrisio, while on his way to the door, "and what a start it will give us for our intrigues with Florence, to have you in Val di Nievole at the head of eight hundred veterans!"

"As to Florence," said Marco, to put an end to the conversation, "you remind me that to-night I have to write to the government there. So good-bye, Cousin."

"Farewell, then," answered Lodrisio, and departed.

Marco, when left alone, spent some time in walking up and down the room in an excited manner, and with his head bent down; from time to time he shook his head, and made a gesture with his hand, as if to throw something off his mind; at last he stopped, and said, in a loud and decided voice, as if giving himself an order:—"I must now write to the Florentine Government."

He then unbuckled his sword, so as to be more at his ease, and hung it against the wall; but in taking hold

of the weapon by the hilt, he caught sight of Beatrice's favour, that riband which he had fastened there, and looked at it for an instant, then turned contemptuously away. He now approached the table, took a sheet of parchment, uncovered the inkstand, dipped his pen in it, and finding it wrote too thick, began to mend it; but as he turned and re-turned it, cut it and re-cut it, his brain began to spin. In a few moments he recovered himself, and suddenly remembering what he was about, and what he intended to do, he threw away the pen-stump which he had spoiled, took a new one, dipped it in the ink in a determined manner, and began to write:—

"Nobilibus dominis, sapientibus, etc., et Comuni Florentiæ, amicis diligendis precipue, Marcus Vicecomes cum sincera dilectione, salutem." When he had come to this point, he leant back and gazed at the ceiling, thinking how he should begin his letter; but after remaining in this position some time he received no inspiration, and the letter made no progress.

At last he took up a great mass of manuscript that was lying before him, and throwing it roughly behind his chair, sprang to his feet, and striking his forehead with his hand, began afresh to pace the room, talking to himself all the time.

"But did not I know before that she was like Ermelinda? Did not Ottorino tell me so, both verbally and by letter, twenty times over? What an idiot I have been! The voice, too, hers exactly! and the smile, the figure, the expression of the eyes! Poor little dove! at the first sight of her, at the sound of her voice, I seemed to live over again my early years, my years of hope! Oh! how far off they seem! The poison breath of evil had not then tainted my heart—at Ermelinda's side everything seemed smiling, I saw a friend in every one—and afterwards? What troubles and what base ingratitude I have met with! And I also got involved in that slough of despond; I also got drunk with blood! and yet I feel as if I was born for something better. Beatrice! it is a lovely name!"

Here he interrupted himself with a smile of contempt, such as he might have bestowed on an inferior whom he had detected in some derogatory action.

"And are you the same Marco," he cried, "in whose hands lies the future of all Italy—you, who are hardened by so many years of bitterness, by such lengthened and severe trials, and on the very threshold of that great dark future to which you are boldly advancing, do you allow yourself to rave about a mere girl? What would that cynic Lodrisio say to it? Away, foolish vapours, and let my star shine forth again with its accustomed splendour!"

So saying he resumed his unfinished letter, and did not lay his pen down or look off the paper till he had filled four closely-written sides; after which he retired to rest, with his brain full of Guelphs and Ghibellines, of Pope and Emperor, of intrigues and war.

A few days after, Ottorino, returning from Pavia, where he had been sent to negotiate with certain conspirators, came to his chief, having made up his mind to ask point-blank for his consent to take Beatrice as his wife; but when they met, he found him looking so morose and severe, that his resolution failed him. The young knight first explained all that related to the affairs for which he had been despatched, and then, the better to lead up to what he wished to say on his own account, he began to talk about the Count del Balzo, taking his cue from a dispute the Count had had lately with a friar about the illegality of the deposition of Pope Giovanni; the result being that the friar had given in to the arguments of the Count, who had thus made a great hit.

Marco laughed to himself at hearing of an affair which he had himself carefully arranged some time before. Our readers must know, that as soon as the Count del Balzo arrived at Milan, Marco, wishing to use him for his own purposes, had arranged that his house should be frequented by divers well-known military leaders and learned men, who discussed there the various controversies of the day; and in order not to leave him with no weapons but his own, which were not altogether of

the finest temper, he had secretly provided some valiant champions, among whom was our old acquaintance, the advocate of the Limontese; and these worthies came gallantly to the aid of the master of the house whenever they saw that he was getting the worst of the argument.

We may fancy how proud the Count must have been, being able to hold forth all day to an attentive and obsequious audience, and in addition, to make converts to his own opinions.

And in regard to these conversions, we must in all confidence let our readers into another secret. They were for the most part the result, not of the eloquence of the orator, but of another eloquence, stronger and more impressive, which was derived from the news from Tuscany, to the effect that the cause of the Antipope Pietro da Corvaria was hopeless, while that of Pope Giovanni was gaining ground every day. Another kind of argument, *ad hominem*, which is apt to work marvellous changes even in the most obstinate minds, came out of Marco's coffers, which were well supplied with money, and always open. And then after this transaction, the convert, if he were a person of any reputation for learning, was admitted to Balzo's house, and there, after having disputed a little with the host in favour of opinions already renounced, he would show himself ready to yield to the force of his opponent's arguments, the weight of his example drawing after him his more ignorant brethren.

These were artifices suitable to an age which was characterized more by roughness and grossness than craft or malice. In our days, when men's minds are so well trained in the art of deceiving their neighbour, these same devices would appear palpably ridiculous—fit only to ensnare women and children.

But to revert to Ottorino. He had, as we know, mentioned the Count for the sole purpose of leading up to his daughter, and now had no sooner finished his description of the conversion of the friar, than he observed a queer kind of covert smile on the countenance of

Marco, who was not displeased to see how well his artifice had succeeded. At this the young knight took heart of grace; but Marco, whose brow was soon again overcast, said to him with an air of ill-concealed displeasure:

"How's this? When I believed that you were busy with your harum-scarum companions, comparing your lances and swords, and discussing horses and feats of arms, I find you settled down among the doctors, disputing with them about Popes and Church-law?"

"But you must remember," replied Ottorino, a little confused, but none the less glad to be able by some means to approach his wished-for subject, "the Count has only just come to Milan. I am not ungrateful to him for all his kindness, and—to tell the exact truth—to his family also——" But he stopped short, seeing a dark cloud as of anger gathering on his listener's face. "I am in bad luck," he said to himself; "I have caught him at an unlucky moment. What can he have in his head?"

He then tried to turn the conversation, but in an embarrassed manner, as one who, finding he cannot say what is uppermost in his mind, is obliged to cast about for some other topic in order not to appear foolish.

Marco let him run on, observing silently his agitated demeanour and incoherent words, and fixed on him a penetrating glance, which seemed as if it would pierce through him; a glance, before which there were no eyes so proud or so resolute that would not quail. At last the young man was relieved from his difficulty by the appearance of a page, who announced that the Abbot of San Ambrogio was waiting without.

"Let him come in," said the master; and Ottorino took his leave, somewhat piqued by his ill-success, but without being much concerned at it, as he attributed the coldness of his reception to his leader's capricious temper, more than to anything else. He, therefore, resolved to carry out his project the first time he found Marco in good humour.

In the meantime he spent most of his time at the side

of his lady-love, talking to her of his devotion to her, and his hopes, and also of those delightful days when they were together at Limonta, recalling especially to her memory the day of the famous shipwreck, and that of the hawking party; playfully requiring her to explain the coldness with which she had so often tormented him. Everything now, however, ended happily; for either by a gentle remark smilingly made by Beatrice's mother, or by a broken word or a shy blush from her at the repetition of these recollections, the enamoured boy acquired the certainty of being first in the heart of his mistress.

On one of these days he received an invitation from his chief to accompany him on a riding-party through the city; and out of a numerous troop of knights, he was selected by Marco for the honour of riding by his side—a favour that was intensely coveted by all the young admirers of this remarkable man. Marco, responding as he rode, sometimes by bowing and sometimes by waving his hand, to the acclamations of the people who crowded at the windows, on the terraces, and in the streets to see him pass, treated his cousin in the most affectionate manner, and seemed to wish to make up by this unusual cordiality for the harshness with which he had treated him at their last meeting.

"Look here, cousin," he said, after a time, "I must go very soon into Tuscany, and you shall accompany me."

The youth was quite disconcerted with this unlooked-for announcement, and answered, hesitating—

"You are most kind, but—just at this time——"

"What! Is there anything you have more at heart than your chief at this time?"

"No."

"But what is it?"

"You must remember that I am to be one of the managers of the tournament, and that my name is on the proclamation."

"If that is all, it can be easily arranged. My court is not so badly stocked that we cannot find a knight to

take your place. When the concerns of your chief are in question, you know that non-appearance is excused. I understand you," he continued, forcing a smile; "and suppose I guess why this sudden departure annoys you. It is because Franchino Rusconi is to arrive so soon at Milan with his daughter. But cheer up, for this once duty shall not interfere with love. Before setting out you and she shall be betrothed."

Ottorino, driven into a corner, saw that he must no longer waver, but explain himself decidedly, so he began—

"I cannot bear displeasing you, but I implore you by the fidelity with which I have always followed you——"

"And what is this preamble to lead to?" said Marco, roughly cutting his words short. "Have you changed your mind?"

"Indeed!" answered the youth; "I have never pledged my faith to Franchino's daughter. It was only a castle in the air; and I fully think I am still perfectly free."

By this time the cavalcade had reached the Brera del Guercio, and was passing in front of the palace of the Count del Balzo. Marco and Ottorino raised their eyes at the same time towards an open gallery, where the father and daughter were standing and looking on. The reader will easily guess on which of the two riders the latter's glances were directed, while her father leant over the parapet, bowing and smiling at Marco. After they had passed, the young man tried to renew the interrupted conversation, but his lord, with a stern look, signed to him to drop behind, to where the standard was carried at the rear of the procession; after which he dropped the reins on his charger's neck, and burying his spurs in its flanks, urged it at full speed as far as the courtyard of his palace, where he dismounted, went up stairs without saying a word, and was not seen again all the rest of the day.

We must now ask our readers to turn back with us as far as Limonta, where we left some of our friends, on

whom the storm was just going to burst. I allude to the sixty free lances under the command of Bellebuono, who were coming to spread death and havoc throughout the district.

Whilst these freebooters, having started in the evening from the shore of Lecco, were sailing quietly along with rapine and murder in their hearts; while Lupo, on the other hand, was rushing at break-neck speed over the intricate paths, so as to get in time to warn the threatened people to fly or to prepare to defend themselves; the Limontese, in happy ignorance, had gone home as usual to attend to their ordinary evening business.

The cottage of the boatman—father to the man who was drowned—was situated, as we have said, on the other side of the town, looking towards the north. All that could be seen of it from the lake was a portion of the thatched roof, with a wooden cross on the top, the rest being concealed by two aged chestnuts, which seemed to fold it in their embrace. The interior consisted of one wretched room, with a mud floor, a railed-off dais, and the walls all begrimed with smoke. In one corner was a truckle-bed, concealed under a thick, rough coverlet, called a catalana, from Catalonia, where such articles were made, a name still extant in some of the villages on the Lake of Como. This had been the resting-place of poor Arigozzo, and at that moment there was sleeping upon it a water-spaniel, so lately his faithful companion.

About two yards from the foot of the bed stood a massive chest full of earth, inside which, according to the ordinary usage at that time all over Europe (as chimneys had only just been invented) the fire was made, on which was placed a boiling-pot on a tripod. Before the fire, and towards the middle of the room, was a beechen table, while the rest of the furniture consisted of four straw-bottomed chairs, half-a-dozen oars, a small rack fastened by pegs to the wall filled with three rows of plates, three earthen porringers, and three brass spoons as bright as gold, a chest, a three-pronged fork, and a net made of twigs.

Near the table, beneath an iron lamp, by a hook in the wall, old Marta, the mother of the drowned man, sat spinning. Her old weather-beaten face, seamed with many a wrinkle, her upright carriage, the firm movements of her limbs, denoted a strong and robust constitution, not broken down by the labours and hardships of poverty. But that countenance, formerly so peaceful and serene, was now darkened by a recent and unaccustomed sorrow. Any one seeing her for the first time might easily observe on those features a pallor by no means usual, and somewhat deeper wrinkles, and yet you would readily guess that those eyes, now swelled with recent tears, were not much accustomed to weeping.

Her lips could be seen to move, as in prayer, but little could be heard, save a few last syllables dying away in gentle murmurs, and accompanied by frequent and reverent inclinations of her head.

From time to time she turned her eyes to that small bed, and then raised them to heaven, as if praying the Lord to take her to himself and re-unite her to her dear Arigozzo.

Michael, with his back turned to the table, was sitting near the fire, bending over it, and stirring with a ladle some millet and milk porridge which was boiling in the pot. His countenance displayed a rougher and more sturdy sorrow, mingled with a certain amount of anger and irritation. He kept his back studiously turned to his wife to prevent her maternal sorrow increasing his own, and went on with his task without once raising his head.

Some half-hour afterwards the woman rose to her feet, took her distaff, went to the fire, and took down the pot; and then approaching the rack, still absorbed in her devotions, her eye fell on the three porringers placed there; she took them out mechanically, and in her preoccupation repeating the actions she had been accustomed to for so many years, she placed all three on the table, put a spoon at the side of each, poured out the food, and called out:—"Michael, come to supper." But as the husband was approaching the table the wife perceived

that she had placed one trencher too many, and therefore seized hastily one of the three porringers and put it on the ground, pretending to have filled it for the dog. But this hasty action did not escape the husband: he noticed that third spoon which still remained in its usual place on the table, and guessing the loving forgetfulness of the mother, turned his face aside to hide his emotion, and after taking up his plate and spoon, he went back to his former place.

Marta bent her head down on her chest, took a moment to compose herself, and then called the spaniel by his name. The dog lifted his head slightly from between his legs and wagged his tail, but did not move, so she went towards the bed, and caressing him with her hand and voice, she took him up and set him down close to his portion. In old days she had never favoured the dog; she had always had a grudge against him, and on his account had sometimes scolded her son, because in years of scarcity she looked upon the creature as a burden on the needy family; but since Arigozzo's death it would have appeared to her actual sacrilege to deprive the poor animal of any of its accustomed comforts or to say an unkind word to it.

The dog thanked the good woman in his own way for this unaccustomed attention with a low howl, that was almost like a human groan, and at last put his nose to the plate, licked it for an instant, and then sprang again on the bed, and crouched down quietly as before. "See, this poor beast wants to die like him," said the old woman to herself, after watching him. She sat down, crossed herself, and began to eat. She took a few spoonfuls of the porridge, after having stirred it up, but she could hardly swallow, and it was only when her husband turned round to place on the table his bowl that she gulped down in haste two or three mouthfuls to show him that she was inclined to eat.

Directly after, she saw that the bowl her husband had put down was almost as full as before, so she took it up in one hand, and going up to him where he was sitting by the fire-side, she touched his shoulder, and said—

"Michael, cheer up and eat, for God's sake; you'll never last out, if you behave like this: all day long you eat nothing." The boatman, without answering, roughly moved his shoulder away, and she continued sadly: "Come, eat something at least. Do you wish to die of starvation? You ought to feel it your duty to take care of yourself: if it was only for my sake, for what should I do without you?" and then a burst of tears choked her utterance.

"Will you never have done with your weeping?" the boatman was at last driven to cry out: "all day long you are at it!" and drying his own eyes with the back of his hand—"What can I do? I can't bring him to life again. By my soul, I can't bear it much longer!"

The poor old woman drove back the bitter tears which so often made her heart swell to bursting, wiped her eyes on her apron, and returned to her spinning.

For a short time neither spoke; the wife, though never stopping her work, glanced from time to time at her husband, who, seated on a low stool, with his elbows on his knees and his head in his hands, seemed to be weeping.

At last he got up, and coming near his wife he touched her, and seemed to be about to say something to cheer her, as if he had wished to make up for his roughness with some tender word; but in the end, he only said—

"Well, Marta, I will do as you would have me, I will eat to please you," and began to eat. "Look here, Marta," he went on after a time, "to-morrow I must take the Syndic of the district to Dervio; so with the money he gives me we will have a mass said for the boy, and it shall be at Lugano, where there is no interdict."

"I have already had a mass said," answered the wife, and pointing to the distaff full: "Do you see that wool?" she said; "it is for the priest of Lugano; the spinning pays for the price of the mass."

The boatman pressed his lips together, for they were trembling with the sudden pang of sorrow which he felt,

and keeping his tears back with difficulty, he felt at the same time a sensation of intense affection for the aged companion of his life, which was more holy, and, we will even say, more tender than the first fervent love he had given her in the days of his youth.

CHAPTER XII.

THE hour was late; nothing was to be heard but the low murmur of the lake, drowned from time to time by the rustling of the wind among the branches of the chestnut-trees overshadowing the boatman's cottage, when suddenly the dog raised his head from his crouching position on the little bed, pricked up his ears and began to growl, then leapt down and ran towards the door, barking violently. Michael and his wife strained their ears, but could hear nothing unusual. The husband unfastened the bar of the door and went out, and then heard, far away to the right, towards Limonta, the baying of another hound, the fisherman's dog. He then went up a rock behind his hut, and looking towards the town he saw the sky on that side quite red, and the higher cliffs reflecting a changing light, which ran along like a streak of flame.

"A fire at Limonta!" he cried out, and hastened off at a rapid pace to give what help he could.

"Take care of yourself!" his wife called after him, and then she returned to her house to kneel in prayer to God.

Michael heard on his way some shouts which came from the town, and soon after other cries from many parts—from the mountain side, and then from the shore; at first these were so distinct and definite that he could have pointed out almost the very house from whence they came; but by degrees, as the different sounds gathered strength, they became confounded in one long continued roar.

At last he reached a height from which he could ascertain that the fire had not been accidentally caused, for he saw two houses burning at the same time at the

two opposite ends of the village. He strained his ear, putting up one hand behind it, to collect the sound, and amidst that noise and confusion he distinguished loud voices raised in anger and blasphemy; he fixed his eyes intently on the churchyard, and in the midst of the tumult, he perceived a gleam as of armour and spears, which made him suspect the true cause of it all, and we shall see that he guessed aright.

In the meantime the conflagration increased—in a moment it seemed as if the whole country was in flames. The lake seemed on fire; some boats might be seen leaving its shores with vigorous strokes; at first they and their inmates seemed almost red-hot, but they grew paler as they proceeded, and tinted with a fading colour they at times vanished from sight, and again returned to show themselves in the last streaks of light leaping on the waves, till they were at length entirely lost in the infinite darkness of the night.

The boatman felt tempted to start off into the midst of that scene of slaughter, but he was restrained by the remembrance of her whom he had left alone in his poor hut.

While he was standing there, he at last heard a noise of some living creature approaching; he drew behind the trunk of an old olive-tree, and by the light which the flames threw even to that distance, he saw a woman advancing with a child in her arms, a little girl hanging to her apron, and dragging behind her a small cow. The stubborn beast was continually turning round to look towards the village, attracted, perhaps, by love of its forsaken stall, and lowed at intervals; then might be heard at various distances, and in various directions, many lowings replying to the first, from other unfortunate peasants, who were escaping with their families, their solitary cow, and their few possessions.

Michael soon recognized the woman, and came forward addressing her by her name.

"What is the matter?" he asked. "Tell me if I can help you?"

"The soldiers of the monastery have set fire to the

whole country," answered the terrified creature, "and are killing all those who fall into their hands. We are undone; we are all ruined. Oh, mercy! what things I have seen. This is the last night for Limonta; the Lord must be punishing it for some great sin. Michael," she added, in an imploring voice; "since Providence has sent you, do me the charity to help me to pull on this obstinate beast, which is all that is left to me to support my poor children."

The boatman took the rope in his right hand, and the little girl in his left, for she was trotting after her mother weeping, and adapted his pace to the small hurried steps of the child, and thus they wended their way all together towards Bellagio.

"The Lord will reward you," said the unhappy woman, "for your kindness to the poor widow; it will be paid back to you in the other world, and it will help the salvation of your Arigozzo. Ah, Michael! the whole country pitied you, and talked of nothing but your grief; but to-morrow, how many will have to mourn for a son, and how many will envy you for having lost yours in the way you did."

He, in the meantime, walked on with a bursting heart, now glancing at the country on fire, and now at his own cottage. When he had placed the widow and her family in safety, he returned in all haste to his hut.

Just as he was stepping inside, he saw a man coming towards him partly dressed in armour, and believing him to be one of the troops who was devastating Limonta, he seized the bar of the door, and went boldly to meet him, but the soldier at once cried out: "Michael, don't you know me?"

"Oh! is it you, Lupo? Do you belong to these marauding scoundrels?"

"God preserve me from it! I was hastening to give warning, but I was not in time, for the soldiers had already arrived, and the place was on fire and our people either killed or flown; now, since force can do nothing, we must think of some plan to prevent, at least, the evil which is not yet done; to snatch from those devils'

clutches those whom they have taken alive, and whom they are going to hang to-morrow, as Stefano, the fisherman, told me, whom I met on the shore of the lake."

"God preserve us! you can count on me; but what can two do against so many?" said the boatman.

"We are not alone; there are some others who are waiting for us, and I have just thought of a stratagem; but you must help me, and I have come to seek you knowing you are a man of spirit."

"God preserve us!" again said Michael; "you see——"

But his wife, guessing the loving anxiety which made him hesitate, said at once: "Do not think of me; the angels above will watch over this house, and even if—why it is only duty to one's neighbours, and must be done; so go, go!"

Michael only replied with "God keep you," and departed hastily in company with Lupo, who, on the road, explained his plan. They made some changes in it together, and prepared each their own parts. When they arrived at the village, Lupo, taking a cross-road, went to pick up three or four other Limontese, armed with hatchets and knives, who were waiting for him crouched down in a cave; and Michael, entirely unarmed, without even a stick, went straight off to the churchyard, where were assembled the soldiers of the monastery. He had hardly made his appearance there, when one of them ran upon him with a drawn sword; but the boatman, lifting up his hands before they met, cried out: "I am come to see your chief; is he not called Bellebuono?"

"And what have you to do with Bellebuono?"

"That is a secret. Come, tell me where to find him, and it will be for your advantage also."

"At the worst," said the soldier to himself, "this is another simpleton come to fall into the trap; he will only serve to increase our sport to-morrow. Well, then, old bumpkin," he said aloud, "come with me." And so saying, he led him into the little church, where was collected the small booty taken in the place, and where

were standing, with their hands tied behind them, the party of seven wretches who had fallen alive into the power of these ruffians, who were amusing themselves by tormenting them. Michael recognized the priest among these poor people, who, as he entered, was just receiving a savage blow from the fist of a soldier.

"There is Bellebuono," said Michael's conductor, pointing to the very man who had dealt the blow. Our boatman went up to this person, who at first appeared ready to eat him alive, but soon softened down on hearing some information which was whispered into his ear. They spoke for some time under their breath, and, at the end, the chief of the sixty lances chose out four soldiers, and went off guided by the Limontese towards a small house some little way from the village, near the valley of Roncate.

"You say it'll be more than three hundred florins," said Bellebuono to his guide, they two being eight or ten paces in front of the four soldiers of the escort.

"Certainly!" was the answer; "it is the church plate and the savings of twenty years."

"But is not the priest's house the one over there near the belfry?"

"The one I am taking you to belongs to his nephew, and the treasure is there."

"Why the devil did not my soldiers find it out while they were foraging about all night?"

"But it seemed so unlikely. It would never enter anyone's head to search where I told you."

Meanwhile they arrived at the little house on the side of the hill, and Michael said, "Here it is!"

"Now, you, Ribaldo, and you, Vinciguerra," said Bellebuono, "stay here as sentinels, and let no one out unless with me; and at the first notice you are to summon the others if we want them; and the rest of you come with me."

"Look here," said the boatman to the leader, when he had given these orders—and he spoke in a voice to be heard also by the other four soldiers—"you have promised me in return to set all your prisoners at liberty."

"Yes, I've promised you; I'll give them all to you, except the priest, who has wearied me so often with his cursed sermons, that I want to bury him nicely alive, to see if he'll have as much talk in him when he has got his head downwards."

"No, no," replied Michael; "you engaged for all."

"Well, then, I'll give you the priest also, provided always that I am not disappointed in the treasure you promise me."

The man who had got the order stayed to guard the door; Bellebuono, Michael, and the other two soldiers ran up a staircase, and found themselves in a passage, in front of which was a small door.

"If you want me to go down with you," said the Limontese to the leader, "I will show you the place."

"Ah, you knave!" answered he, "there's some trick in the wind, and you'll be running away and leave me in the lurch like a fool. No, no, remain with these two good fellows, who will keep you company. Soldiers, whatever may happen, don't let him out of your hands till I come back."

The two lancers took the boatman between them, who, on his part, made no objection, and only went on speaking to Bellebuono, who with a lantern in his hand, advanced to the door mentioned before. "You can't mistake: after the second room, a winding staircase, and under the fourth barrel, a square stone."

"Yes, yes, I remember it all," answered Bellebuono.

"Do you wish me to come also?" persisted the boatman.

"I can do it by myself." These were the last words of the trooper, who had already penetrated to the second room. They heard the sound of his steps descending a staircase, the light of the lantern gradually diminished and at last disappeared entirely. Some moments of silence followed, after which was heard, down below in the cellar, a dull noise, as if something heavy had fallen.

The boatman trembled all over; his heart was in his mouth. It was fortunate for him that there was not light enough for the two guards to remark the sudden pallor of his countenance.

"What can that noise be?" said the two soldiers to each other. "Can Bellebuono have stumbled? can he have moved something? do you think any one could have been hidden there? shall we go and see?"

"Let's go! but no; he said we were to wait here."

While this discussion was going on they perceived, by the light of a burning house, Bellebuono appear at the door where he had entered and make a sign to the boatman, who, having approached, they exchanged some sentences in an under tone, and then Michael, raising his voice so as to be heard by the soldiers in whose charge he had been left, said, "Now that I have kept my promise, it is for you to keep yours."

They now went out, picked up the two others who had remained as sentinels, and all took their way towards the church. When they were in a narrow lane, the boatman fell behind with the man whom the four lancers continued to obey as their chief, who seemed busily engaged in shaking some blood from his gauntlet.

"And what odds?" he said in a low voice, "after all it would be more suspicious to be free from blood than to be stained with it such a night as this."

They whispered together a little longer, and then stopping short, the boatman called out to the four lancers, who were in front, and said: "Look here, your leader is going down to the shore for a moment, to send off in a boat something or other which he has under his arm, and will be back directly. In the meantime you are to go on with me and release the prisoners."

Then the man who had scarcely spoken latterly, said in a low voice to the soldiers, "Take this, Ribaldo, and you, Vinciguerra, and you two besides"—and gave to each of them a handful of silver money—"this is your earnest-money, so go and release those prisoners at once." So saying, he sprang down the incline and disappeared.

The boatman, with the four soldiers, continued on their way, and one of the last said to his companion, "Did you notice how changed Bellebuono's voice seemed —how unlike himself?"

"It was because he had his visor down," answered the other.

"I'll tell you what it was rather," said another, "it was because of what he had under his arm."

"The devil!" said a third. "We soldiers are not used to see so much gold, and it rather confuses us."

"And did he really say he would go shares with us?" said the first soldier to Michael.

"Look here," was the answer, "one half he'll keep for himself, as is only fair, and the other he'll divide between you four."

"And you, my good fellow," said the first man, "ought not to be left with empty pockets, for you are an honest fellow, and the soldier's friend."

"As for me, I only ask for what your captain promised me; but if you will give me anything, it will be so much charity."

"Come, take this, take this!" and each one put in his hand a piece of the money they had received just before, for their hopes of further gifts from Bellebuono made them feel very liberal.

They had now arrived at the church, and on their entrance the four soldiers, in Bellebuono's name, ordered the sentinels to let the prisoners go, and at once to cut the cords with which they were tied. When they were unfastened, and on their feet, Vinciguerra said to the boatman—"Now be off, my good man, and be satisfied."

But while Michael was on his way to the mountain with his rescued friends, who, nearly besides themselves with joy, overwhelmed him with a hundred questions, the news of the affair went the round of the Sacristy, and a crowd of soldiers ran up to prevent the prisoners' departure.

"It's not true!" was the universal cry; "it can't be true that these are Bellebuono's orders!"

"Yes, it's true enough! he told us himself!" answered the four lancers.

"No, no, it is all made up," returned another still louder. "I tell you that as he was going off with you, just now, Bellebuono stopped a moment behind to say in

my ear that another rope must be got ready for this peasant when he came back."

"But then he told us his very own self," urged the four soldiers; "he ordered us to do everything this good man wished, and to release the prisoners."

"No, no; it's a lie; there is some plot underneath!" shouted the greater number of the rabble, and some of them were beginning to lay their hands on the prisoners and the boatman, when there was a sudden cry of "Bellebuono! Bellebuono! here is Bellebuono!"

And there he was sure enough running towards them entirely dressed in armour, with his visor down and his powerful spear in his hand. As soon as he was among the crowd, he lifted the weighty ashen weapon and laid about him right and left, calling out, or rather grumbling between his teeth, "You scoundrels! You rabble!"

The sufferers drew back in much confusion, and tried which could excuse themselves most humbly. "I did not think you could have given those orders. It was because you told me yourself before." But he never stopped laying about him, not caring whom he hit.

When they were all dispersed, he gave his arm to the priest, and made a sign to the other rescued ones to follow him, and went off with them on the first path that led to the mountain, leaving the soldiers, in their amazement, to interchange mutual recriminations, and to make the best of their bruises.

When they had got some way, the priest turned to his deliverer, who still held him by the arm, assisting him to climb the mountain, and thanking him in the best way he could, told him that he could now go back, as they were in safety. All the others pressed round the supposed Bellebuono, declaring that they owed him their lives. Then he, taking off his helmet, discovered himself. The reader will have already guessed that it was Lupo who now appeared before them.

The soldiers waited that night and the next day, and the next, for Bellebuono to come down from the mountain, but they might wait for ever: the four men who had accompanied him on his last expedition went back

to the same house, and down the staircase they had heard him descend, then into a ground-floor room, and further on into a cellar, where, in an adjoining hole, they found him stretched dead on the ground.

Then they understood clearly the cunning of the clown, as they called him; they understood that there must have been men hidden in the cellar, of which they found a material proof, for they discovered a cuirass and a soldier's jacket, which one of Bellebuono's murderers had taken off in order to conceal himself under the armour of that ruffian, and to mislead the soldiers of the monastery in the way he did.

The fury of those disappointed scoundrels may easily be imagined. "The rascally traitor!" they said, foaming at the mouth; "if we could only get hold of him! Yes, but the treacherous peasant has found a den; he has ran off with his wife, and all the others who escaped are safe too, the villains!"

The sixty lances remained still for five days at Limonta, venting their rage on those poor houses and fields; but then finding they could not discover the fugitives commanded by Lupo, they re-embarked at last for Lecco, not without leaving behind eight or ten of their comrades, to enrich with their corpses the fields they had devastated.

The news of these events arrived at Milan at last, and came to the ears of Marco Visconti the evening of the same day on which he had taken that ride with Ottorino which we have described above—a day black and agitated even for him who had had so many turbulent adventures.

The Abbot of San Ambrogio arrived in panting haste at his palace, and gave him the whole history.

The Abbot of San Ambrogio, the brother, as we have said, of Lodrisio Visconti, was quite devoted to Marco, who made use of his name, and proposed to employ the forces of his convent for his projects, with which the reader is acquainted, but which were quite unknown to the Abbot, who was used as a tool by his brother. Marco and Lodrisio knew only too well that the Abbot would

not have been willing to separate himself from the Anti-pope and the Emperor, by whose favours he had been raised from a simple monk to such a height, and therefore they had judged it best to leave him in ignorance of the secret. For however firm a friend you may have, however much he may revere and fear you, to insist on his cutting off his feet to please you would be too much, and Marco knew enough of men never to ask too much of them.

After the Abbot had related very fully and vehemently the story of Limonta, he concluded by saying: "And all this is the work, in a way I should never have expected, of one of our own relations, one of your own creatures; yes, those rebel peasants have found protection under the shadow of your name."

Marco, who had allowed the prelate to give vent to his passion without interrupting him, felt his own anger rising at these last words, and turning on the speaker a severe glance, "What do you mean by mixing me up in this affair? Your reverence," he said to him, "do you know that although I am not accustomed to allow any under me to neglect or go beyond any of my commands, I yet am not used to suffer unjust blame to be cast on any of my people."

"Forgive me," said the Abbot, at once perceiving that he had made a mistake; "it is not that I mean to speak of any of your immediate followers; I said one of your people, as a form of speech, because he is in the service of one of them; but he is quite unworthy of the post, for he is the son of a cut-throat, and looks what he is."

"Well, what is he?"

"He is a squire of Ottorino's—one Lupo, son of a falconer of Count del Balzo; it was he who killed Bellebuono. I told you that some armour and a soldier's jacket were found by the corpse; did I not?"

"Yes, you said so."

"Well, these are recognized as belonging to this Lupo, and I am told that he is coming back directly to Milan, to Ottorino's house, as if nothing had happened. But I repeat, I am sure that Ottorino had nothing to do with

it; not to speak of the relationship between his family and mine, he knows how well I stand with you, and would certainly have refrained from injuring me. And, besides, it is easy to see that this scoundrel has acted out of his own head, for, being from Limonta, he wanted to assist his own people. So I came to ask your leave—to beg you to be willing——"

"To do what?"

"That the monastery of San Ambrogio, as representing the Count of Limonta, should exercise its rights of lordship, to punish this criminal."

Marco appeared doubtful what to say; and the other became still more pressing, and said: "If it only concerned an offence personal to me I could forgive it; but, you see, it has to do with the honour and interest of the monastery."

"Yes, yes, the old story," said Marco, interrupting him. "Well, you must settle your own affairs as you please; what have I to do with them?"

"I have come to you to show my consideration for you, and the gratitude which I owe you for so many favours," said the Abbot. "Do not think that I forget that even my new dignity is your gift."

As regarded the dignity of Abbot, this was true; Marco had obtained it for him from the Bavarian; but as to the more recent one of Cardinal, he had nothing to do with it; it had fallen to this prelate by a decree of the Antipope Pietro da Corvara, who, seeing himself sink lower and lower, sought by distributing incumbencies, dignities, indulgences, everything but pence—of which he had none—he sought, we say, to create partisans for himself of people interested in keeping him in his place, and who, at the worst, might be companions in his fall.

Marco, however, accepted the compliment as a whole, without any scruple as to limiting the gratitude of his old client, who now departed, making great protestations of devotion, offering himself, his monks, and all the feudatories of the monastery for the service of him and his friends.

This new incident increased still more the anger which Marco felt against Ottorino, for though in the Abbot's presence he had shown himself indignant at the mere suspicion that any of his followers should have had a hand in the business, in his heart he believed that Ottorino could not be entirely guiltless; that Lupo had not left him in the dark as to what he was about to do. He thought that his intimacy with the house of Balzo might have induced him to do something to assist the Limontese. His thoughts then flew to Beatrice, and he was more than ever consumed by jealous rage.

CHAPTER XIII.

YES, with jealousy. Since that day when Marco had seen, for the first time, the daughter of the Count del Balzo, the image of that lovely maiden had remained fixed in his mind, like a vision in the dreams of a fevered man. She was, indeed, ever before him; in the midst of stormy councils, terrible secrets, she appeared to him; she was linked to all the joys and hopes of his indomitable soul; now becoming part of a splendid future, she spread around sweetness and celestial peace; now, on the contrary, it seemed as if some nerve was severed, and he was wandering in the midst of a dark, cold desert, where riches, and power, and fame, everything that usually agitated his life, was changed to vanity; it was as if, in the heat of a dance, the music had suddenly ceased, leaving the dancers astonished and in inextricable confusion.

At a time of life vigorous, it is true, but of a mature vigour, when the illusions of youth are past; accustomed for many years to the uncontrolled license of military life, his sensibilities deadened by the shocks of fate and the general wickedness of men, to abandon himself to love! And yet he did so abandon himself, with the thoughtless rashness of an inexperienced youth, and with the fatal resolution of a man who had always lived under arms, and in the midst of bloodshed.

Marco had never truly loved any other woman than Ermelinda. That love, when it became hopeless, had gradually declined as years rolled on, and had given place to the fury of faction, to thirst for dominion and vengeance, to all those other desires, some magnanimous, some base, which made him appear to the world in that both glorious and guilty character which our chroniclers

have handed down to us. But, however, Ermelinda had never quite been effaced from his heart; the remembrance of her would suffice to control him sometimes in the stormy impulses of his anger—would prompt him to grant life to the supplications of an enemy, to raise one who had fallen, so that he seemed as if he might be still the friend of that angel, the young Marco, that Marco changed by fate and passion into something so different. By this time he knew that she, the mother of grown-up children, must have lost her first beauty; but still, when his thoughts turned to her, he could only fancy her as she was in the morning of her days, gay, blooming, with that face, those eyes, which, in his youth, had made the light and happiness of his life. He had never seen her since, and her image was still in all its youthful freshness before his mind. He could no more fancy those charms altered in any way by envious years than he could imagine that a portrait of youth and beauty could fade and wither into age on the canvas. And therefore when he saw Beatrice first at Milan, and found the daughter so like his remembrance of her mother, he was fascinated in an irresistible manner, his heart accepted her as its own; that heart, grown lukewarm, and even cold, by lapse of time, kindled into new life, beat with its old strength, and bent under the former yoke.

At first having persuaded himself that it was only a temporary ebullition of his passion drawn from so many memories, he was angry with himself, determined to conquer himself, and felt sure of doing so; but the very exertions he made to throw off the toils in which he was entangled, only drew them closer round him. Wearied at last with his efforts, he relaxed them, without becoming aware of it, in the hope of bringing to a happy end the love, which he now found too difficult to conquer He thought how any prince in Italy, to say nothing of Count Balzo, would welcome the honour of having him as son-in-law, and as to Ermelinda, he thought that though he had killed her father, he had killed him in fair fight, and out of vengeance and fierce love for herself; and that, therefore, the abhorrence which she would

naturally feel for the author of that crime would be, in some degree, softened by the cause of it; because there is no woman of such ferocious and austere virtue that does not incline secretly to excuse the faults derived from love for herself.

On the other side, in those times of perpetual war, passions were always awake, vengeance always ready; blood was paid for by blood, and discords were too frequent for cases not often to occur where the murderer was allied with the family of the murdered one.

These thoughts gladdened his soul; he began to feel easier, and the poison of love entered deeper into his blood, thrilling each fibre as it ran.

The time came when he seemed to have made peace with himself; he felt a new and fresh life added to his former one; the future, towards which he was hastening, seemed to become more beautiful and smiling; he had never desired so much the lordship of Milan, he had never urged on so vehemently the perilous career that was to lead him to it, as in those few days, in which at the end of all his visions he saw Beatrice, at whose feet he could lay everything and himself.

But the first suspicions of the attachment between the maiden and Ottorino soon came to awake him from that dream. Any comparison is too feeble to describe the madness of his wild soul at the cold touch of jealousy. He remained for a long time considering whether his fear had any foundation; he was determined to satisfy himself, and did so on the ride described before.

That day he had arranged with Lodrisio the whole intrigue to deprive his nephew Azzone of the lordship of Milan, and Marco had decided to go himself to Ceruglio to enrol on his own account the rebel German band, as he had planned, and was to start as soon as possible; but since he had felt convinced of the love of the two young people, everything was upset. How best could he arrange his future course?

Should he take Ottorino with him? but the boy might be unwilling; or if he came willingly, he did not wish to have him always before him. Could he send him,

under pretence of some negotiation, to a distant country, where he might be delayed till Marco's own return from Ceruglio? But he could not feign affection for and confidence in a serpent who had stung his soul. Should he leave him here, near Beatrice, he might find them, on his successful return from his enterprise, already married. This idea maddened him, and filled his heart with a rage beyond all control.

But after having wavered between a hundred alternatives, he inclined to a gentler course; he resolved to depart in any case, but first to summon the Count del Balzo, in order to inspire him with a great terror of the Rusconi, and to threaten him with fearful consequences, if ever, for Beatrice's sake, Ottorino should fail of his promise; he knew his man, and was certain of the success of his scheme.

After he had settled on this plan, new hopes began to fill his soul; he allowed himself to listen to some arguments which shook the despairing certainty he had at first felt. Who could prove that Beatrice had responded to Ottorino's love? There was no proof, except that very natural blush which had appeared when she saluted the young knight from the balcony, when they passed on horseback. This had sufficed to convince him, but might he not be wrong?

He longed to clear it up, and determined to see Beatrice, and question her himself as to the state of her affections. He caused a feast to be prepared for the day preceding that which he had arranged for his journey, and invited the Count, letting him know that he expected him without fail, in company with his daughter.

In the meantime, a new affair happened which would have easily led Marco by another road to the same end. We will describe it after having briefly spoken of Ottorino.

Ottorino felt very indignant at the severe and morose way in which he had been treated on the last occasion of seeing his chieftain, and had returned to justify himself, and to excuse himself for his hesitation when invited to go to Tuscany, to offer to go there after all, and to beg

to be re-admitted into favour, but the door was always denied to him; and at last he was told never again to set foot in that house.

It need not be said how keenly he felt this. Only too far from suspecting the true reason for this treatment, he put it all down to his refusal of Rusconi's daughter; and in truth that seemed cause enough to account for his fall in the good graces of a man like Marco.

Then he began to think seriously of his own affairs—to renounce Beatrice was not to be thought of; but how should he arrange it with his leader? It is true, that when coming from Monza, he had boasted to the Count of being his own master, and of being able to marry without the interference of Marco; but this was really boasting, and now in cold blood he felt he could not break with this man—Marco Visconti! We are a little acquainted with him, and he knew him better than we do; and putting on one side the dread which the animosity of a man of that temperament might reasonably cause in the most intrepid soul, Ottorino could not bear the thought of quarrelling with one who had always loved him as a son, under whom he had entered military life, by whose hands he had been admitted to knighthood; with him, in short, whom he had always looked upon as his example, his guide, the bright star that shone on his path.

And there was another reason also; if the youth had decided to take a high tone, to cross the bar, so to speak, and carry off Beatrice, without regarding wind or tide, then the Count would have refused her to him: he had said only too clearly that he would do nothing to break with Marco, and if he had not said so it might easily have been said for him.

Ottorino, torn by so many contending thoughts, became agitated and melancholy, and his depression could not fail sooner or later to be remarked by Ermelinda and her daughter, with whom he was accustomed to pass a great part of his time. They began to urge him to tell them the cause of his new trouble, and he tried to parry their solicitude, either by silence or by turning the con-

versation, till at last they both began to suspect something serious.

And the maiden's father—the Count del Balzo? Poor man! quite intoxicated with his triumphs, with the compliments which he constantly received, with the respectful treatment he met with on all sides, as an intimate friend of Marco, he scarcely now remembered he possessed a wife and daughter; he seemed to think himself above all earthly ties; and woe to Ermelinda if she attempted to draw him from his proud heights, to recall him for a moment to some affair down below; woe to her if she spoke of Beatrice, of the nuptial arrangements that did not proceed, of the suspicions she had conceived from the behaviour of Ottorino, why he flew at once into a passion: "What a fuss you are making! Let things go on quietly—is not everything smooth? what difficulty can arise? they will be betrothed when he returns. One would think you wanted to get rid of her!"

Ottorino, after some days, began to show signs of a desire to hasten the marriage as much as possible, insinuating at the same time the need of keeping it secret, and at last driven into a corner by Ermelinda, who was determined to come to the bottom of the matter, he owned something of his fears as to Marco, as much as to say that perhaps it might displease him to announce it openly at once, so as not to appear to have broken with the Rusconi. This might be the state of the case, but, however, the lady did not feel at ease, for, in her opinion, this scruple would not be sufficient to agitate the youth in the way it apparently did. So she persisted in her inquiries, till at last he told her everything as it really was, or, to speak more correctly, as he thought it was; and it may be imagined how uneasy and alarmed Ermelinda became.

After this, whenever the loving mother found herself alone with her daughter, and saw her silent and sad, she guessed that her reticence was fretting Beatrice's heart —but what could she tell her?—that she must think no more of the marriage? that she must forget Ottorino? She did not really think that it had come to this pass;

and then she well understood it would be too late, that a flame was kindled in Beatrice's heart which could not now be extinguished! A flame which would consume away her life!

She thought it, therefore, her best course to tell her everything. Ottorino, often in frequent private conversations with the ladies, tried to cheer them with fallacious hopes. "Marco," he said, "is soon going to Tuscany; he is sure to stay there a long time; new scenes, and the new concerns in which he will be involved, will dissipate all these vexations. He will see clearly that this is only an impediment to be easily surmounted, a momentary caprice; it is just like the man; but when Beatrice is mine, everything will arrange itself for the best, you will see. One thing arises from another; time makes great changes. What may happen before he returns—who can tell? Perhaps it may no longer matter to him to break with the Rusconi, or that the Rusconi may feel it concerns them too much to keep friends with the Visconti, to make wry faces over a castle in the air; because, as I have often said, it is not only that I have never given my word, but Marco himself never entered into any engagement. And then the devotion with which I have followed him, the fidelity I have shown to him, he is too noble to forget such services as these."

Beatrice's mind seemed set at rest by these and other reasons, but the mother felt uneasy and harassed.

And it was another trouble to think that if the Count ever found out Marco's opposition, everything would be put a stop to; rather than risk displeasing that august person, he would instantly break the compact, so they must all keep quiet; and with the understanding that the marriage should take place so soon as Marco should have departed for Tuscany, things went on quietly till the day when a squire of the Visconti came to the house of Balzo, to invite on his lord's part the father and daughter to the feast, of which we made mention before. Ottorino was quite comforted, and though he was annoyed at seeing himself excluded, he combated all the reasons Ermelinda brought forward to prevent

her husband taking their daughter, and all the reasons urged by Beatrice herself for not going there, as soon as it was understood that she also was invited.

On the evening of the feast the Count paraded about a saloon in his own house, in a robe of flowered velvet, made for the occasion, and a pair of shoes with the points much longer than the feet, turned up, and fastened with a chain of gold which passed under the knee; he strutted like a peacock with pride at seeing himself so gay. A sister of his, who was to accompany Beatrice instead of her mother, was seated by Ermelinda, impatiently waiting for her niece, who was delaying under some pretext or other, and at last pretending that her silver wreath hurt her head, was having it arranged by Lauretta.

A secret terror filled the girl's soul as the time approached for appearing before Marco, now that she knew that Ottorino had fallen under his displeasure; she trembled at the mere imagination of being with this man, of sustaining his piercing glance, and needed to borrow a little courage from the presence and words of the young knight, for whose sake principally she forced herself to bear this ordeal, but he did not appear; and what was more strange had not been seen all day.

When the wreath was arranged, the aunt rose up, and taking Beatrice's hand, who knew not how to excuse herself from accompanying her, was departing with her and the Count, and had arrived at the door of the hall, when Ottorino suddenly appeared in great haste and trouble, crying out, "Only imagine! Lupo has been seized by the satellites of the Abbot of San Ambrogio; seized by night, treacherously, while he slept; they have condemned him to death, and to-morrow morning will be his last!"

Lauretta, on hearing to what a state her beloved brother was reduced, rushed off in agonies of terror to tell her parents; all the others remained as if bewitched.

"I have implored, I have promised, I have threatened," pursued Ottorino, "but all in vain. The Abbot must be certain of the consent of Marco, or he would never have dared to lay hands on a squire of mine."

"Listen, Ottorino," said the Count, stammering in his agitation: "I told you how it would be, but you would act in your own way."

But the ladies, both at once, interrupted him; for they felt time must not be lost in useless recrimination, if they were to find some remedy for this trouble.

"Why do you not go at once to Marco?" he said at last to Ottorino. "The affront has been put upon you; you are bound to him by ties of blood and friendship."

"I have been to his house, but he refuses to receive me."

"What? What do you say? Marco will not listen to you!"

Ottorino in his agitation, forgetting other considerations, told how affairs had been going on, and how Marco, for some time, had not been willing to see him.

"Then you are in disgrace with the Visconti!" exclaimed the father of Beatrice. "Ah, now I understand what Ermelinda was muttering to me about a little time ago! that I must not let Marco know anything about the wedding being settled, nor speak of you to him. This is the key of the mystery, and I was told nothing about it. Well, well, if it is, I cry off, I wash my hands of the whole affair."

"And will you let the son of one of your retainers die, without saying a word to save his life? that life which he has voluntarily exposed for his country and for you?" said Ermelinda.

"Good heavens! don't you see I am already in the Abbot's black books? And then what claim have I? what influence with Marco, that I could take so much upon myself?"

But here the Count's sister came to the aid of the supplicants. "What," she said, "are you not the most intimate friend Marco has? his nearest confidant? Have you not told me so yourself many times? and is not this an affair known to everybody? and will you draw back when it is a question of saving one of your retainers?"

"But how can I?"

"You can and ought to do it," persisted the sister.

"Look here," urged Ottorino, "the night when Marco is taking leave of his friends, in the midst of festive gaiety, he cannot refuse the first favour asked of him—he has a humane heart. Tell him that this is a brave fellow condemned for having saved his countrymen, for having snatched innocent people from the claws of a savage rabble; remind him that this is a soldier, who has fought under the banner of the Visconti serpent, and has stained it with his blood; that he must not let a valiant man die the death of a malefactor; that Lupo has a father and a mother."

Here Count del Balzo looked towards the door, having heard from that quarter the sound of groaning and weeping, rapidly approaching; soon after the door was flung wide open, and there entered the falconer, Marianna, and Lauretta, all in tears, as white as death, and overwhelmed with misery and terror. Ambrose threw himself at his master's feet, embraced his knees, and raising an almost convulsed face, tried to pronounce some words, but only succeeded in uttering a broken and inarticulate groan; you could see his pale lips tremble, and hear the convulsive chattering of his teeth. All eyes were fixed on him; even his wife and daughter seemed almost as if they suspended their own grief, to attend to his more awful sorrow.

"My son! my son!" he exclaimed at last with difficulty. "Oh, save my son!"

The Count bent down to raise him from the ground; but he shook his head and waved him off. "No," he cried, "leave me here to die; I will not rise till you have promised me to save him."

"I will do all that is in my power; come, get up, Ambrose, take courage: I promise you to use every endeavour; come, you must calm yourself."

"Do you hear?" said Marianna; "the master has promised you; do be calm and trust in the Lord."

"You have promised me? Oh, tell that man, in whose hands lies the fate of my Lupo, that man, who with a word, can give him safe back to me, tell him to think of

his own father, whose favourite son he was. And, if the Abbot will have satisfaction, I am here, the same flesh and blood, I, who advised him, and the fault is mine: he only obeyed his father." Just then catching sight of Ottorino, who, in his first agitation had not been perceived by him, he rose at once to his feet, and going towards him with a gesture more resolute than respectful: "It is for you to save him," he said—"for you, who placed him in the straits he now is in."

"And do you think?" said his wife, in a tone of reproof, "do you think this is the way to treat a gentleman so good, who is doing everything for him, who is here only for that purpose, indeed."

"Oh, may God bless you!" burst forth Ambrose, quite cheered, "forgive me; pity a poor father who is beside himself, and knows not what he says or does. Away, I implore you, do not lose time—pray go, and return to bring news which will give my life back to me."

The Count dried his eyes and said to him: "Do not doubt that I will do for you all that I would do for my own son." He beckoned to Beatrice and his sister to follow him, and set off. Then Lauretta, who had done nothing else but cry and sob, ran to Beatrice while she was leaving the hall, and pressed her hand, kissing it, and bathing it with tears: she could not utter a word; but her entreaties were expressed by her eyes, her face, and her whole attitude.

Outside the door, in a second hall, they found Bernardo, the falconer's other son, standing there waiting for them, as stiff as a post.

You must know that Marianna, who thought of this her favourite son, more than of anything else in the world, at the first announcement by Lauretta of the fatal news had sprung to her feet.

"It is your place, Bernardo," she cried, "it is for you, to run down to the master, you who can talk. We are common people, but you can say the things as they ought to be said."

The stupid fellow began to stammer out: "But how

—tell me?" but Ambrose rushed off down the staircase, and his wife and daughter after him.

Now, during the time when the poor father, prostrate at his master's knees, was supplicating him with words that came from his heart, and to which every heart responded; words which an orator might admire and respectfully imitate; the wife in her obstinate folly thought: "Oh, goodness! he is doing nothing but weep and lament! what good will that do? I could speak better than that, and if Bernardo was here, he would soon find what to say;" and so when leaving the first hall after the others, she found him by the door, she was quite comforted, and taking him by his arm: "Now you speak," she urged, "for we do not know how to say anything."

Then he placed himself in front of the Count, and in the voice and cold, stiff manner of one who is reciting a sermon learnt by heart, began: "Although Lupo—notwithstanding that my brother has gone astray." But his father catching him by his shoulder, gave him a shake and called out: "Let him pass, for God's sake."

The master passed on unimpeded, and Bernardo remained there in his place, looking like a fool, straight against the wall, with his arms glued to his sides, gazing after him with his mouth open.

CHAPTER XIV.

IN the meantime the banqueting hall was resplendent with innumerable wax-tapers, the light of which was reflected from the ornaments and mirrors on the walls, and from the wreaths and jewels of the gay dancers. In the midst of the sparkling scene, and the joyous sound of musical instruments, Marco, gnawed by secret cares and uneasy discontent, spent his time inwardly cursing that foolish gaiety, which accorded so ill with the tone of his feelings, and in which he was bound to appear to share. From time to time he went off into a room which opened into the hall, placed himself at a window, and looked down into the court-yard, to watch for the arrival of Count del Balzo, straining his ears to try and distinguish the noise of horses approaching; but he could hear nothing but the echo of the festive sounds, which reached to a great distance. He was obliged to return to his former post, and to go on looking at the dancing, and to talk of the morrow's tournament, and to receive the good wishes and compliments of his friends on his journey into Tuscany. But his heart was far away.

Wearied with the long waiting, he sometimes absented himself from his guests, and shut himself into his private rooms, forcing himself to remain there as long as possible, in the hope of finding, on his return to the hall, the wished-for guests. At last he joined the noisy talkers, to try and pass away the time, which seemed to him never ending.

Two hours had been, perhaps, spent in this tormenting manner, when the Count at last appeared with his daughter and sister. Marco, who at that moment was

at the other end of the hall, saw that the girl was pale, and agitated; and shuddered, overcome by mingled emotions of pity and love. During the short time he spent in crossing the hall to meet them, he felt at one time that she appeared to him as an angel, and at another as his bitterest foe; he felt inclined at one moment to prostrate himself at her feet—the next to assail her with bitter words. But he did not allow his agitation to become apparent. After the usual words of welcome, the aunt took Beatrice by the hand, and led her into the midst of a party of matrons and maidens, who saw with mixed astonishment and envy the beauty of the girl, enhanced by a certain native purity which she had brought from her mountains; a simple manner and an ingenious grace, tempered now by her anxiety for the life of a human creature, into a softer style of loveliness.

Count del Balzo had remained alone in Marco's company. Both wished to be together; both wished to begin a conversation, so as to lead up to a desired subject; but neither spoke, hoping that the other would be the first to break the ice, and say something which might be applicable.

Marco had begun to walk up and down, and his companion followed him, in the greatest perplexity; he prepared in his mind a hundred exordiums, and dismissed them again, and was constantly on the point of opening his mouth, without bringing out a syllable. At last he took courage, and said something about the festivity; but his auditor allowed the subject to drop at once, so that Beatrice's father found that he had better come to the point by the shortest road. So he took a grand resolve, and began:

"Will you listen to me, Marco? It may appear to you, perhaps, that I am taking a liberty with you, but your kindness emboldens me, and I—wish to ask a favour of you."

"A favour of me?" replied Marco, walking towards the embrasure of a window, where the Count followed him.

These words were spoken in a tone of cold and surprised haughtiness, so that the speech which his poor friend had prepared died away in his mouth.

After Visconti had remained silent for a moment, as if waiting for an answer to his proud question "of me?" an answer that did not come, he asked, with a smile full of angry bitterness:

"Had you not better ask the same favour from Rusconi; he who must be so indebted to you, would, perhaps, be more inclined to grant it?"

Beatrice's father felt his blood freeze, and in great embarrassment stammered out:

"What do you mean? I am not aware of having offended any one; and as to Rusconi, I hardly know him!"

"Oh, you may be sure that he will make himself known to you," replied Marco. "Rusconi is not the sort of man who will forget an obligation, or who cannot reward services done him even by one who is unknown to him." And, so saying, he moved as if he would go away.

But the other, pressing nearer:

"I beg you," he urged, "to explain yourself. What do you mean? I really do not know. Unless it is on account of this boy—of Ottorino."

Marco, who wished to draw him on to explain himself further, did not answer, but continued to pretend to move off.

"Look here, I know nothing about it; it is not my fault," urged the Count, with still greater vehemence. "The boy, it is true—I cannot deny it—let us say that he did wish to marry my daughter; but I spoke very openly to him, said I would not hear of displeasing you, and that I never should be persuaded to give her to him, unless first——"

Marco, who was becoming feverishly excited, could not control his impatience, and interrupting this speech, asked:

"But Beatrice, does she agree willingly to this marriage?" and waited for the reply with such a countenance, that the Count turned cold

"Beatrice?" he answered, hesitating. "You ask me about her feelings. She would always accept whatever bridegroom her parents proposed to her. The poor child is as gentle and innocent as a dove, and she only cares for her mother and me."

"Then," continued Visconti, "you think she will not be unhappy if this marriage is stopped."

"Unhappy? No, indeed! She is not that kind of girl. I know exactly what my daughter is made of, and she has not a thought in the world for this man."

On hearing these blessed words, Marco was seized with such joy and such universal charity, that he would gladly have thrown his arms round the speaker's neck, but he restrained himself, remembering that what had not yet happened might still take place during his absence in Tuscany, if he did not find a way of keeping the youth away from Balzo's house; and the surest means was that already devised, of inspiring the girl's father with a fright of some mysterious danger ever hanging over his head; whereupon, with an expression not quite so stormy as at first, but still far from exhibiting the present peaceful state of his feelings, he answered:

"As this is the case, so far it is well for her and well for you; for I should have thought it a very serious misfortune for you to be on bad terms with a nobleman of the position and temper of Rusconi; and also on my own account, I confess I should regret to have to reckon among my—among those who are against me, and with whom I cannot be on good terms, a friend of my early youth." And here, assuming a confidential tone, but in a lordly style, as of one who lowers himself for a moment to an equality with the person addressed, he placed a hand on the Count's shoulder, and then added: —"Perhaps you do not know that I have arranged myself the engagement between Ottorino and the daughter of this Comese noble. Now the boy appears to me to hesitate, and even to wish to draw back; but matters have now reached a point when it concerns my own honour. Enough, if you agree with me, everything

will be smooth, and Ottorino will not make any objection, for he knows it will not suit him to contend with me."

"Oh you may be sure," said the Count, "that you will not be annoyed by anything connected with me; and if I had known before how things were, I should certainly not have allowed the youth to visit so freely at my house on any consideration; for your favour and my own peace are worth more to me than all the gold in the world."

"Well, we will forget the past and speak of it no more; but for the future———"

"For the future, I give you my word that he shall never cross my threshold, if the world was to fall to pieces. You may be assured of it."

At this point Marco would willingly have dropped a hint to the Count of the intentions he had about Beatrice, but he could not decide on doing so before himself questioning the maiden; for to obtain her through the authority of her parent, without assuring himself of her spontaneous predilection, seemed to his haughty and impassioned spirit a worse alternative even than losing her altogether. But having now brought his companion to the desired point, he dismissed him by saying:

"Well, Count, that is enough, and I am very glad to remain much better friends with you than I expected before this conversation." Then he pressed his hand, and going off into the centre of the hall, joined a group of knights who had collected round the newly arrived beauty.

The Count, without leaving his position in the window, began to find grievous fault with his wife, his daughter, and Ottorino for having involved him in such an unfortunate affair.

After he had digested a portion of his rage, after his great fears had calmed down, and he was somewhat comforted by thinking that the error was repaired, he recalled Lupo, and the favour he was to have asked for him from Marco.

He remembered Lupo, his parents, his sister; he recalled their piteous words, their faces, their tears; he thought of the promise he had given, and felt strong

remorse and shame; but not even all these considerations could make him hesitate as to what course he should pursue.

The idea of speaking to Marco about a squire of Ottorino's, after that scarcely civil treatment—it would be ridiculous, he thought to himself. "No, no, that would not suit me at all; Lupo and all his people must fare as they can, but I cannot mix myself up in it for any one's sake. There will be a great lamentation at home. Ermelinda and Beatrice will cry out. Let them do as they please! I will cry louder than they. I'll let them know that I am not a man to bear with arrogance and dictation." Occupied with these fancies, he managed to work himself into a great rage; and then leaving the hole where he had been hidden so long, he showed himself in the hall with a very morose countenance.

Beatrice, from where she was, had seen her father in prolonged colloquy with Marco, had imagined that they were speaking of Lupo, and waited breathlessly to hear the result. When Visconti, moving away at last, had returned to the company, she turned on him by stealth a timid and anxious glance, to try and read on his face the fate of her *protégé;* but not being able to make out anything, she awaited her father's arrival. After a considerable interval he appeared, looking in the way we have described; and as it appeared to the damsel that his face bore a verdict of condemnation, she was very much troubled.

"And what did he say to you?" she asked him, as soon as he approached.

"About what?"

"Why, of course, about a reprieve for Lupo, which you begged of him."

"Reprieve! I have asked for no reprieve!"

"Oh, holy Virgin! has he then refused you? Did he say no?"

"He has neither said no nor yes; it's not my business, nor yours. Do you understand? and you must hold your tongue, do you hear? for with your prating you have nearly ruined us all."

"But have you changed your mind?"

"Yes, because I know something now, which I did not know before."

"But is it really so? Is there no hope? Must he die?"

"Yes, be quiet, I tell you, silly girl, and don't make a scene."

"Look here, I will speak to him, I will throw myself on my knees to him, and beg him so much——"

"You, too! that is the only thing wanting to——"

"But why not? only tell me."

"I have told you quite enough; take care, and attend to your own concerns."

With these words the Count disappeared among the company, and his daughter remained so stunned by his words that she felt she must be in a dream.

Marco, who, in the meantime, had never taken his eyes off her, on seeing her father leave her, approached the seat where she was, and asked her, after obtaining her aunt's permission, to do him the honour of taking a turn with him round the festal hall, and he would then point her out the knights who were to be the managers of the tourney.

Beatrice, who wished much to have an opportunity of pleading for Lupo, with her aunt's permission, accepted the hand offered gallantly by Marco, and departed in his company.

"The champions are, as you know, to be twelve," said Visconti to the damsel, leading her down the hall; "eleven I can show you, for they are all here, but the twelfth you will not find in this room; but I am aware it is not necessary for me to point him out to you, for you are already acquainted with him, are you not?"

Beatrice blushed deeply, but said nothing.

"I saw you salute him very kindly a few days ago, when we were passing together before your house; and also I know he was at Limonta for a long time, and that now——"

"Yes, I know him," said the maiden, bending her head down shyly; "and he has a squire for whom——"

"We will not speak of his squire, if you please," interrupted Marco; "let us speak a little of him himself."

At this point, the girl, who, following her guide, had now arrived in a long room, next the last of the halls where the feast was held, turned round and saw her father putting his finger on his lips, with the intention of reminding her to be silent and careful. This only increased the embarrassment and fear of the poor child, already frightened to death at finding herself alone with the man, of whom she had heard so much said, and now after hearing words which revealed to her the jealous secret of his heart, to know that she was about to be his petitioner for so important an object! Summoning therefore all her maidenly courage, which had never been needed at a more difficult crisis, she began in a tremulous and imploring voice:

"My lord, may I hope that you will listen to my humble and earnest petition?"

"Did you not accept me as your knight and vassal?" replied Marco; "so you must not use such language to me. You have not to offer a petition, but merely to signify your will."

There was a few moments' silence, and during that time they were passing through three or four other smaller saloons, and had arrived in a room apart, out of sight of the guests at the banquet. The girl, entirely occupied with what she was about to ask Visconti, and he, engrossed by his absorbing passion, were far from thinking of what there might be strange and unseemly in withdrawing in this way from the party, and may indeed be said to have been entirely unaware of it.

When Beatrice found herself in that solitary place, she looked round, at first a little confused, but the moment after she fell down on her knees, before her companion, and said, sobbing:

"One word from you can save him: have pity on a miserable family: oh, if I could weep in the way his poor father wept just now! if God would put his words into my mouth, I am sure you could deny me nothing."

She spoke in this manner, believing that her father, according to his intention, had informed Visconti of everything; but he, who knew nothing, hearing himself now addressed with such fervour, and not guessing the subject, at first was quite stupefied, and then giving way successively to compassion, love, and the confusion of seeing in such a servile attitude the queen of his thoughts, forgot everything else, and bent down to raise her up, saying to her with agitation:

"What are you doing? No, I will not have it! you must rise! you of all creatures shall not prostrate yourself before a human being."

She, however, would not leave her position, and continued to implore him, joining her hands, and raising them to him with tearful eyes, in such an attitude, that it appeared to Visconti at that moment, to see in the girl before him her own mother, who in the same way had thrown herself on her knees to him, in earnest entreaty, so many years before, that night when he had come to carry her off from her paternal home. He felt almost beside himself; raised by force the supplicant, made her sit down on a couch, and while Beatrice, covering her face with both her hands, wept immoderately, with grief, shame, and confusion, so that the tears gushed out between her white fingers, he, without daring to approach her, continued:

"Oh! tell me your wish, and I swear to you, as my hope of eternal salvation is dear to me, that I will do all that in me lies to content you; all! if it concerns the State; my life, my honour. Tell me, then, release me from these torments; tell me who it is, that I can save!"

"Lupo," answered the girl, between her sobs.

"Who? That vassal of the monastery of San Ambrogio, who is condemned to die?"

"Yes, he is the son of my father's falconer, and brother to my own beloved attendant—oh, if you had seen their grief!"

"Now pray do not weep any more: Lupo is safe, I give him to you. I wish I could redeem each one of

your tears with a drop of my blood! There, Ermelin Ermelinda! you madden me; Beatrice, do not weep Lupo shall not die."

"You have said that he shall live?"

"Yes, and I swear it on my soul."

At these words the girl sprang quickly to her feet, and flying towards the deliverer, attempted again to throw herself on the ground to thank him; but she was not able to do so, for he caught hold of her and prevented her, forcibly, and she, confused, excited, and exhausted, by the sudden relief, let herself fall into his arms. Marco felt himself tremble beneath that beloved burden, the hot tears of the beautiful girl fell on his hand, and her tender bosom beat against his agitated breast; quite beside himself, he bent for a moment over that fair head, and kissed it. Beatrice was aware of the kiss, but was not more disturbed than if it had been a kiss from her father; she raised herself calmly, and while her eyes were still red and wet with tears, there appeared on her face a smile expressing her new gladness; in the same way as the sunlight appears after rain lovely and welcome among the thin clouds in a breezy spring sky.

The hero was in the hands of a child. Marco went to a table, and, without sitting down, wrote a few sentences to the Abbot of San Ambrogio in mingled terms of entreaty, command, and threats, to desire him at once to set at liberty the same Lupo, of whom they had spoken some days before. He fastened the letter with a silken riband, on which he placed his seal, wrote the address, and, giving it to Beatrice:

"Let the Abbot have it," he said, "and Lupo will be restored to you."

"God will reward you for the innocent blood which you have spared," said the damsel—"the many tears which you have dried; the whole family will pray for you always, always;" and she turned to the door to go away.

"Beatrice!" said Marco, and signed to her to stop; "I ask you to give me one more moment: you will have

ue to send the letter before to-morrow morning. Listen: I am to depart this night for a long journey, but the memory of this moment—your memory, Beatrice—believe that it is for ever enshrined in my heart."

"And I shall not forget the kindness you have done me; I will pray for you also. And to think that I was so afraid to speak to you before. My mother told me that you had a good and generous heart."

"Then your mother does not hate me? then she has forgiven me? and you, Beatrice, do you forgive me also? will you not hate me?"

"I? what can you mean? my gratitude, my respect:"

"That is not enough for me, and it is not what I require of you," exclaimed Visconti, taking her hand between his own, which trembled as a leaf. "Why should I dissimulate longer? Do you know, Beatrice, that from the moment I saw you, my destiny was fixed unchangeably? I am waiting now, with panting eagerness, for a word of life or death from your mouth."

The girl trembled in her turn, and attempted to leave him. But Visconti, interrupting himself in the middle of his speech, as if suddenly struck by a new idea, which had just flashed into his mind, unclosed his hands, so that Beatrice could withdraw hers; and quite changed in expression by this thought, after a moment's silence, he questioned her in a stern tone:

"Tell me, this Lupo is a squire of the person of whom you spoke to me just now?"

"Yes, he is his squire."

"His?—whose?"

"His; your cousin's; that knight," answered the maiden, who could not venture to pronounce his name.

"Tell me—whose?" he asked her, fiercely.

"Ottorino's," said Beatrice, becoming suddenly as red as fire.

"Now; answer me as you would answer your confessor at the point of death," continued Marco, in a deep but trembling voice. "Is it to please him that you come to ask me for Lupo's life?"

"It was my father who was to speak for him."

"That is not what I ask. Tell me from your own soul, if it was he who induced you to take this step."

"Yes—at least, he begged my father, because, being in disgrace, he did not venture."

"Ah! you know all his secrets! And when did you see him?"

"A few minutes before coming to your house."

"And you see him every day—do you not? and the promise which you have given him—tell me—did it come from your heart? are you in love with him? tell me, in God's name."

Beatrice was silent with terror.

"You do not deny it, then?"

"No, I do not deny it," uttered the girl, faintly. "He—is to be my husband."

"Death and damnation!" burst forth Marco, with a voice of compressed thunder, and snatching, so to speak, from Beatrice's hands, the letter, he fell upon it furiously, as if he was going to tear it in pieces.

The poor child felt her knees tremble, her eyes grow dim, and fell in a dead faint on the floor. Visconti stood gazing at her for a moment with a fierce and malignant expression; his right hand glided imperceptibly towards his dagger, but he withdrew it at once, and placing the letter in the girdle of the swooning girl, he went out precipitately down a secret staircase into an inner courtyard. Feeling himself urged by an irrepressible impulse, almost amounting to madness, to move about and rush into the open air, he jumped on a horse that was standing at the door in readiness for his departure that night, and galloped down the street immediately before him, so fast that one only of the many attendants who were to have escorted him was just in time to scamper after him, and even then, unable to overtake him, was obliged to follow at a respectful distance. Such was the temper of that mind, which at the first outburst of passion, forgot both past and future, and was entirely absorbed in the immediate present.

He set off as if flying from a pursuing enemy, but

this enemy was seated on his own horse's croup, and left him neither peace nor breathing time.

As he sped on through the darkness, he seemed to feel somewhat refreshed by the cool night breeze playing on his face; and continued to gallop on like one possessed, hearing no sound but the clatter of the horse's hoofs and the whistle of the air which he was cleaving so furiously, and which blew about his forehead; his locks all bathed in perspiration.

His noble courser, with loosened reins and flanks covered with blood, rushed furiously along, now straight on, now by short cuts, and seemed to devour the way in his headlong course. Soon losing all traces of a beaten track, it galloped away over cultivated fields, waste lands and woods, clearing hedges and ditches, at the risk of breaking its rider's neck against a tree-trunk, or of falling into holes or water-courses. The latter, who, amidst the concussions and shocks he met with in his impetuous and headlong career, felt that the physical exertion kept at bay the bitter anguish of his mind, never ceased to urge on his steed with voice and spurs, which he kept savagely buried in its sides; his mind working all the time in a frenzy of excitement, with a fierce and burning desire to lose himself, and to disappear, horse and all, for ever from the world, till he perceived that he was quite alone, his squire not having been able to keep up with him. He heard the poor animal, quite worn out with fatigue, groaning and panting beneath his weight; he saw it in the twilight, covered with foam, all steaming with bleeding sides, forcing from its open nostrils its thick and heated breath; and, at last, he drew rein, and stopped in the wild solitude, which he had at last reached. He raised his eyes sorrowfully towards the sun, just beginning to rise, and felt only irritated by the increasing daylight which revealed his presence to the eyes of others as well as to his own, feeling that darkness was more suitable to his troubled mind; which seemed to absorb everything into itself under a mysterious sense of infinity and eternity, in which it seemed to be lost.

But, as the day drew on, and his mind returned to itself and to the stern and circumscribed reality of life, it was fortunate that one thought presented itself to dissipate that sad sterility of mind, and to restore his spirits; the thought, I mean, that he had still something left to do, namely, to obtain his revenge.

So, he urged on his horse again and pursued his way, step by step, towards a church tower that appeared above some trees a short way off; and as he went on, he seemed to recognize the locality. Turning the corner of a lane shaded by an avenue of willows, he stumbled upon a country girl with a switch in her hand, who was driving a cow before her, and humming a tune, and he inquired whether the village before him was called Rosate; but the frightened child uttered a cry of fear, and ran away into the fields. Marco pursued his journey with his head sunk on his breast, until he saw through the trees the towers of the castle of Rosate, which was (as we know) one of his fiefs. He saw floating in the wind the square pennon, the distinctive mark of a knight banneret; he saw the helmet, with its crest of a serpent rampant, on the loftiest turret, and when he came to the edge of the fosse that surrounded the battlements, he struck three blows with his sword hilt on the iron pommel of his saddle, the drawbridge was let down, and he entered the castle.

On entering the second courtyard, he met the warder, who ran up to hold his stirrup. This was Pelagrua, the steward of the monastery of San Ambrogio, who had been expelled from Limonta, and whom Marco, as has been said before, had placed here and made him his warder. But before he had time to render him the above service, Marco leapt from his horse, and threw him the reins, enjoining him to tell no one of his arrival.

On observing the anxious looks and disordered person of his master, and the pitiful condition of the horse, the cunning fellow made many strange surmises, all, however, miles away from the truth.

CHAPTER XV.

WHEN Beatrice recovered her senses, she found herself on a bed in a strange room, and at once besought a servant maid, who was by her side, to tell her where her father was. As she spoke she saw him standing on her other side, so raising herself, and then springing to her feet, she caught his arm, and said:

"Let us get away from here, let us go directly."

On their way home, the Count asked her the explanation of all this disturbance; but she hastened on without answering, anxious to arrive in the safe asylum of home. But afterwards, remembering Marco's letter, she found it in her girdle, and took it out, and gave it to her father, saying:

"Here it is; oh, here it is!"

"What's this?"

"Lupo's pardon. A letter for the Abbot, written by Marco."

"But—I do not understand—then he gave you what you asked? but you asked nothing more? you did not allude to—Ottorino?"

"He asked me himself about him."

"And what did you answer? how did you behave? come, speak, have you lost your tongue?"

"Oh, let me alone, I implore you. I will tell all—to my mother."

"Well, your concealments won't succeed. Now, once for all, remember what I tell you, you are never to see that man again, never again."

Beatrice did not answer, and indeed did not understand the importance of those words, being still too bewildered to be grieved by them.

All the way the Count did nothing but storm and

rage, now aloud, now muttering to himself; but when they arrived at their own door, he said to his daughter:

"Give me that paper;" she obeyed, and they went in.

The parents of Lupo, with Ermelinda and Ottorino, and the whole family were there waiting for them. Hardly did they appear in the passage than every one ran to meet them with lights; but on seeing the expression on the faces of Beatrice and her father, the same impression was received by all: they believed poor Lupo was done for, so there was a general cry of lamentation.

The Count, leaving his daughter, who threw herself into her mother's arms, signed to Ottorino to follow him, and when they reached a saloon on the ground-floor, he put into his hand Marco's letter, and then said:

"This is your squire's reprieve; so go now, both of you, in God's name; but remember that neither of you ever enters my house again;" and so saying, he turned round and hastened to lock himself into his own room.

Ottorino looked at the paper, recognized the writing and the seal of Marco, and the unexpected joy of seeing this proof of his follower's safety so absorbed his mind, that it almost prevented him at first from taking in the full sense of the sudden and cruel intimation just made to him.

He ran at once into a hall where all the others were assembled, and raising on high the hand which held Visconti's letter, he cried:

"Pardon! pardon! here is Marco's letter!"

They all rushed to see, to touch that blessed sheet; they cried, they wept, they embraced each other. Lupo's father insisted on having the paper in his hands, and kissed it, and bathed it in his tears, and exhibited it in turns to his wife, to Lauretta, and his other son.

"Now, quickly, to horse!" cried Ottorino, "for time presses."

Two steeds were soon prepared, one for him, the

other for the falconer, who insisted on accompanying him; and away they galloped towards Chiaravalle.

"Give me the letter," said the knight to Ambrose; "give it to me, and I will conceal it."

"Oh, let me have it," implored the father; "see, I have it in my bosom; if I did not feel it, or hold it in my hand, I should feel I had lost the very heart out of my body."

On the road, as was natural, they spoke of nothing but Lupo. He, in the meantime, was spending his time walking up and down a small ground-floor room in one of the towers of the Abbey of Chiaravalle, where was a walnut-wood table, on which stood a lighted lantern, a wooden crucifix hanging on one side of the wall, and a *prie dieu* before it. Four soldiers stood sentinel at the door, a fifth remained in the room with the prisoner; this fifth was Vinciguerra, one of those who had accompanied Bellebuono on his last expedition to Limonta, which we have described.

The condemned man had a firm step and a serene countenance, and was just then conversing with Vinciguerra about the very deed that had got him into trouble.

"Just see what a trick that old peasant played us," said Vinciguerra.

"Come," replied Lupo, "don't let your tongue run so fast."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean, that if we are to remain friends I don't want to hear those brave people evil spoken of."

"Ah, you are all alike, you will do anything to stick by each other; there, you are a mountaineer, and that's enough!"

"Certainly—and I am proud of it; better to be a mountain sparrow-hawk than a marsh wild duck."

"Yes, I know; you are from Limonta and I from Chiaravalle; but after all we are about the same, both vassals of the monastery; what's the good of being so stuck up?"

"Vassal of the monastery—I know I am, for my sins;

but I never did them any service. A nice idea, forsooth! to be ordered about by a fellow with a shaven crown, and a holy-water-brush in his hand!"

"Why, you don't think," said Vinciguerra, "that I care for the cause we fight for. Do you remember the days when we fought together under Marco Visconti?"

"Long live Marco!" exclaimed Lupo, fired by that name, which was wont to make the heart of every Lombard soldier quiver with pride. "That's the man for me! he always was first in performing prodigies in action; and then how freehanded and affable he was, and so friendly with his men; whenever there was any booty every man had his share, and if we had to go without, all suffered alike; not like your fellows, who, crammed and gorged to the eyes, call out to you from the refectory, 'Forward! forward!' And then what fine enterprises! like that last one at Limonta—a lot of armed rabble, who sneak in by night to attack by stealth poor unarmed people; do you call that the trade of a soldier?"

"You are very right."

"Anyhow, if I had arrived in time to get those poor wretches in trim, I can tell you it would have been quite a different story, and would have cost you dear. But I must not think of it—it excites me too much."

"Poor Lupo! we have always been friends and comrades in arms! and now see what I am obliged to do."

"Do your duty."

"Yes; but believe me, having to mount guard over you in here, knowing as I do where I have to conduct you. I really cannot stand it."

"Never mind, wash it down with a glass of wine," said the condemned man; and pouring out two glasses from a large flask, took one himself and handing the other to his companion, said: "Here's to Marco's good health!"

"That is no traitor's toast," replied the sentinel, "for Marco is a good friend to the monastery and cousin to the Abbot—so that I can accept your challenge, and give a good reason for it. Here's to Marco's health and

yours too!" Thus saying, each emptied his glass at a draught.

"Did you drink my health, too?" said the Limontese, when he had finished. "I suppose you meant my soul's health—for as to that of my body, situated as I am now, there remains little to be done. See (looking out of window), the sky is beginning to lighten—there is but a short time to wait now. Is it not to be at an hour after sunrise?"

"My poor boy! I fear it is."

"Listen," continued Lupo; "do we not become soldiers to be killed when necessary? Well, then, to die from the blow of an axe, that splits your head like an apple, or from a lance-thrust that runs you through like a frog—or, anyhow, if you die doing your duty, it is all one, and I am to die for having done my duty. However, to tell the truth, it is *not* all the same—the more I try to soften it off, the more hard it seems. To end one's days on three bits of wood, tied up like a cut-throat, before all the rabble who rush to see you as if you were a criminal hung, is not the same thing as dying on the field of battle, astride on a noble charger, dealing desperate blows right and left, with the braying of trumpets in your ears, and the hope of victory in your heart."

"That is just what I was going to say," replied the sentinel; "in fact, as to dying, what does it matter to me, whether I die to-day or to-morrow?"

"And do you think," rejoined Lupo, "that I am not of the same mind? Why, I am quite prepared to accept my fate; we must take things as they come, and have patience to resign ourselves to face death boldly whenever it pleases God to send it us."

Vinciguerra sighed, filled both glasses again, emptied his own, and then made a sign to Lupo to do the same.

"No, no," replied the condemned man, "I must retain the little sense that God has vouchsafed me for my last moments, so as to leave the world as a good Christian, knowing what I am about."

"Do you wish me to call back Father Athanasius, whom you sent away a little while ago?"

"Certainly not. I have already done all that is requisite. Indeed, I would have kept him till now, but he worried me so with his long stories, that—however, I told him pretty plainly he had better take himself off out of my sight."

"Oh! but he only was here for the good of your soul, to enable you to make your peace with God, and to get you to repeat some prayers, as those kind of things are proper to be done by one who is bound in your direction."

"Not exactly; as long as he spoke to me about religion I listened to him, but afterwards he got on the subject of Bellebuono, and would have it that that was a murder; whereas, if I had no other sin but that—never mind, I told him plainly and clearly that I would do it again without scruple."

"Oh, comrade, I must say I think the priest was right."

"Then you are as great a numskull as the rest; but come, I'll give you a case in point."

"Let us hear it."

"Supposing," said Lupo, "I had got to Limonta an hour earlier, and, through a false message sent to Bellebuono, had enticed him and all the rest of you into a mountain gorge, and had then fallen upon him with my brave peasants, and had killed you all like rats in a trap, should I have done a mortal sin? am I obliged to confess?"

"No; for that would be a stratagem of war."

"And was not what I did a stratagem of war, except that, instead of killing all of you, I only killed one?"

"What has that to do with it?"

"Why, everything. Besides, does not the reason for it count for something? Had I not the right to kill him, to defend so many of my poor countrymen, as well as our priest, whom he was going to torture and put to death for his own amusement?"

"My dear fellow, a fine tale you have told me; the idea of a soldier wanting a reason for what he does!"

"I know that; but what I said was by way of comparison, for this was not a case of legitimate warfare, but an unprovoked attack of a lot of thieves and cut-throats."

"Come, come! gently a bit, with all these hard names," replied Vinciguerra, brusquely. "I can tell you I have always acted like a soldier, and never like a thief or a cut-throat; and if it were not that——"

Lupo burst out laughing at this, and said, "Get away with you, you silly fellow, are you going to quarrel with me, a man who in half-an-hour will be in the other world? However, you have found your match, a man in the death agony——"

"What will you say next, I wonder?" rejoined the soldier, thoroughly nettled by Lupo's words, and the coolness with which he spoke them. "I know that with you—anyhow, we have always been friends; but —you understand there are certain limits—it cannot be allowed."

"But, don't you see, I meant it merely as a comparison?"

"Well, if that was all, there is no harm done."

"I want to part friends, don't you?" replied Lupo, offering him his hand.

"With all my heart," said the other, squeezing it affectionately, and then added, "I grasp the hand of a brave soldier and a good comrade," then turned aside to hide his emotion, afterwards pouring out and drinking off a glass of wine; he raised his hand to his mouth, as if to wipe his moustache, and then passed it twice or thrice across his eyes to brush away a tear.

And now the sad tones of the passing-bell broke the stillness of the chamber. For an instant Lupo seemed unmanned; but quickly recovering himself—

"I see," he said, "I have no time to lose. Listen, Vinciguerra, I have something to tell you; I wished to ask the confessor about it, but he made me so angry with all his nonsense. Yet it is better to entrust a thing to a friend who knows one a little, and feels that we are all human at the bottom, for if they were to see a soldier

—they might think it was through fear of death. Listen, however, I will explain myself in a very few words. The first time you chance to go to Milan ask for the house of Count Balzo, in the Brera del Guercio; there you will find my father and mother." Then, feeling almost heart-broken at the mention of those sacred names, he walked across the room, and, turning to Vinciguerra, "You will not fail?" he said.

"May God neither give me prosperity in this life, nor repose in the next, if I fail to do your bidding," replied the sentinel.

Then Lupo took a silver chain from his neck, and handed it to him, saying:

"Tell them to wear it for my sake; and tell my sister to look in a chest of drawers in the chamber next the falcons' mew, where she will find a small boxwood casket containing a gold ring, which is a last relic of the plunder from Tuscany; I had reserved it for her against her marriage, and now she must keep it as a memorial of my affection."

"Listen," said Vinciguerra. "I am not a wealthy man, but, thank God, I have a little pay left; look here," taking from his pocket a handful of large and small coins.

"What do you wish me to do?"

"You will be doing me a charity by accepting them, as you will save me half-a-dozen drinking bouts. I will take them to your father, who may be in want of them. At all events, they will do him more good than they can possibly do me."

"No, no! thank you."

"Come, do me this favour—vouchsafe me this consolation. I swear to you that I enjoy far more giving away these few coins for love of you, than I should have done had I got the share of the plunder from Limonta promised me by that fellow—your man, I mean. I, too, expected once to swing for my misdeeds, and I well know how dear a man's family become to him at such a time, especially his father and mother; and how bitter is the memory of the many troubles we have caused our

parents; and I well remember how sad I felt at not having anything I could send them as a memento."

Lupo laid his hand on his shoulder, and said: "I feel extremely your kind offer, and I know all we soldiers give and take most generously; but, thank God, my parents have need of nothing. See, too, if I wished to send them any, I have plenty of money here." And, so saying, he emptied the pocket of his doublet, and turned out on the table a good handful of money. "You have sixty soldiers in your company, have you not?" he asked.

"There were sixty of us, but we left eleven of them in your beautiful Limonta country, in that choice expedition of ours, so that, if my reckoning is right, we cannot now be more than forty-nine."

Lupo raised his head, and a proud smile flashed across his face at the mention of the prowess of his dear countrymen. "Well," he said, "I suppose those that are left will have no objection to drink a toast to the health of a condemned criminal?"

'Two, if you like," replied Vinciguerra, "but I will not drink any of that wine; my share shall go to pay for masses to be said for your soul."

"But not by the monks of San Ambrogio, I hope," said Lupo, "take care of that! for I do not want to receive anything at the hands of those schismatic cowards. By-the-bye, I forgot one thing: I have a brother, with whom I have not got on very well, but when one is near death one must put all that aside, if for no other reason, for my mother's sake, whose favourite he is. I must send something also to him. I have a small silver crucifix here, which I had wished to give to you as a memento, and I hardly know how to arrange it between you."

"A brother of yours?" said Vinciguerra. "Well, it is easily managed; I will take your crucifix, and give you this reliquary to send to him—look at it;" and, unfastening his waistcoat, he exhibited it. "It is a splinter of the column of St. Simeon Stylites; I took it with my own hands from a pilgrim on his return from the Holy Land, whom I stripped one night in Romagna."

"Bravo!" said Lupo," "I accept the exchange; you

shall take it to him in my name, as I said; and you shall have this." So, taking from his breast the Christ in silver, he gave it to the soldier, and, throwing at the same time his arms round his neck, he gave and received a farewell kiss.

"Now that I have settled all my affairs here on earth," continued the Limontese, "it is time that I should give all my thoughts to my soul." And, going towards the crucifix that hung on the wall, he knelt down before it in prayer.

Vinciguerra, so as not to disturb him, retired to the door, when he repeated to the four soldiers on guard there what the prisoner had said, and showed them the money which he had received from him to distribute among his comrades, concluding with these words: "As for my share, I have told him already that I shall spend it in masses for his soul." "And add my share." "And mine also." "And mine," cried they all. After which they remained silently waiting for the sad moment, when they would have to conduct the condemned man to the gallows; for they all dreaded to see such a sad end to a young soldier, so valiant and handsome as Lupo: and so, if they spoke at all, it was in very quiet voices; a circumstance less important for him, than worthy of note from those rough fellows, accustomed to spend their lives in nothing but in either suffering themselves or in causing others to suffer.

The courtyard of the palace of the monastery, the portico which surrounded it, and into which the room opened where Lupo was confined, were quite full of curious spectators; idle folk, who, as is the case in all ages and in all countries, hasten to look on at the last punishment of a human creature, as if they were taking part in some festivity or wild orgy: perhaps, from that secret delight which is experienced, without a rational cause that can possibly be alleged, from the contemplation of human nature in the most awful moments of agony, accustoming, as it were, the soul to horror, studying one's own possible fate in that of another's, and thus considering the mystery of life and death.

The hour was already passed when the prisoner was to have been brought to the gibbet, and the foolish populace began to murmur at the delay. Vinciguerra, who felt full of wrath at seeing this stupid and ferocious impatience, revenged himself by using the butt of his weapon on the arms and shoulders of the most forward, under pretence of keeping the crowd away from the door.

At last a report arose which many voices repeated: "They are coming! They are coming!" The people began to push against each other, to surge to and fro, and to raise themselves on their tip-toes, turning towards the door of the courtyard, which opened on the road. Vinciguerra ran back into the room to be at the post assigned to him, and Lupo, hearing his step, rose up, crossed himself, and with a calm expression on his face, asked him:

"Is the time come?"

At that moment the door opened, two out of the four sentries came in, and behind them a monk with a paper in his hand. Lupo perceived over the latter's shoulder that another man was following, and, suspecting whom he might be, cast down his eyes with an involuntary shudder. But suddenly he felt an unexpected and close pressure; and looking up, he found himself in the arms of his father, who, straining him to his breast, was too much agitated either to weep or speak.

"You have made a mistake in coming to see me at this last moment," said Lupo, as soon as he could get in a word; "my thoughts were full of eternal life and the Lord above, and you have done neither yourself nor me a kindness."

Ambrose finding that his voice would not serve him, made gestures of negation with head and hand; and at last, after a long effort, he uttered these words between his sobs:

"No; you are not to die!"

"Oh, yes, I must die!" replied the son. "I grieve for you all; but for myself I have settled all my worldly affairs."

While the falconer was embracing him still tighter, and saying, "No, no, no," with movements of his head, the monk came forward, and said to Lupo:

"Your father speaks the truth—the Abbot has reprieved you."

"A reprieve!" shouted the guards in the room. "A reprieve!" re-echoed the sentinels, who had remained at the door; and this shout was repeated from one to another under the colonnade, in the court-yard, and through the street close to the palace, by the people who were streaming along in crowds.

"Be thankful for the Abbot's mercy," said the monk to the prisoner.

"We came here, Ottorino and I," said the falconer, "with a letter from Marco Visconti to the Abbot to ask for pardon for you."

"A letter from Marco!" cried Lupo. "Marco for ever!" and life seemed even more precious to him when he received it as a gift from that lord.

"Long live Marco!" shouted out the sentinels. "Marco for ever!" was heard from all outside.

In the meantime a hundred different rumours were current among the crowd.

"What's it all about?" "Marco Visconti has come himself to release the condemned man, who is a relation of his." "It is the other knight who brought the Visconti's letter, and is his relation." "No, it is he himself in person, and he has hereabouts a good many soldiers belonging to him; and the Abbot was obliged to give way to him about the pardon." "I tell you that Marco sent a letter to have the prisoner set at liberty." "That's not true." "But Padre Bonaventura said so." "But it can't be so!" "Would you teach me?"

All these disputes changed into one general acclamation when the liberated man was seen to come out, holding his father's arm, who was quite stupefied with joy; and the exultation and glee of the whole crowd would have done credit to the most humane assembly in our softer times.

They were, however, the same persons who had hurried

so short a time ago to see the poor fellow die, and who were murmuring at the delay in the execution. The very same; and what can we say about it? It was not that they really were pleased at the idea of poor Lupo being hung, for they did not know what he had done to deserve his punishment; they only wanted to be stirred by something out of the way, and they had obtained their desire by other means.

After passing through the crowd, which the guards could hardly keep back, Lupo and his father arrived in the square of Chiaravalle. In front of the church they found Ottorino, and close to him some peasants were holding three horses by their reins. The young knight threw his arms round the neck of his faithful follower, and all the spectators clapped their hands and cheered. In a moment they were all three in their saddles.

"Are you not going to return thanks to the Abbot?" said the monk to Lupo.

He glanced at his master, and observing that he made a deprecatory sign and shrugged his shoulders at the same time, as if to say, "Never mind that," he answered:

"I am in too great haste to wait now."

Vinciguerra, who had accompanied Lupo to this spot, flung round his neck the silver chain, and took out of his pocket the money he was to have distributed to his comrades.

"Take this," he said; "this belongs to you."

"Keep the money," answered the Limontese, "and drink to my health this evening all together."

"With all my heart," replied the trooper; "and this time I promise to do you all honour myself. Oh, by-the-bye, your silver crucifix, I forgot to give it to you back."

"Keep it for yourself—keep it in remembrance of me," replied Lupo, shaking his hand; and now set off in company with his father and Ottorino through the crowd, which opened to let them pass.

When they had reached the centre of the square, and were turning to the left to enter a narrow lane, Lupo saw opposite him the gibbet which had been prepared for

him, and waving his hand to it, he said in a loud voice, "Farewell, dear creature!" at which all the crowd began to laugh.

Poor Ambrose could scarcely believe he really had his son at his side safe and sound; as if he must make sure of it every minute, he never took his eyes off him, holding him tight with one hand, and saying to him with a face full of springing tears:

"You scapegrace! you rash boy! you have given me enough frights! now, do as I tell you. Leave off that dreadful soldier's trade; come back home, and live quietly upon the good things God has given you, in company with your mother. Poor thing! how often she has been lamenting that you were not her favourite; if you had seen the poor woman!"

"Oh, I know; I never for an instant doubted her love for me."

"But I tell you she is as fond of you now as I am myself; Lauretta and your brother also, though he appears so cold."

"Yes, yes, I am so grateful to them all."

"So, will you decide to please your father in his old age?"

"Don't let us talk of it now; don't you see I must consult my master?"

"Oh, yes; that is quite fair, for he has been so good to you—if you knew what he has done for you, and so willingly; and the Count and Countess, too, and the little lady, and indeed all. In my misery I had the comfort of seeing and hearing all the good wishes of every one to you."

Ottorino, who felt that in this first ebullition of paternal and filial affection, the presence of a third person was superfluous, rode on some paces in front, pretending to attend to something else; but after having allowed as much time for the outpouring of their feelings as he deemed only fair, he held back his horse, rejoined the others, and checking the thanks they began to express, he said to Lupo:

"We shall have to hurry on to be in time for the

tournament. You know that this is the first day, and you will like to be my squire."

"Indeed I shall; and, will you believe it? I thought of it so much at Chiaravalle; and one reason why I did not approve of the ceremony they were getting ready for me, was that it robbed me of the pleasure of giving you my services in the lists."

"Those polite monks wanted your services, but for this once they had to give up their will; and if you could only have seen what a crabbed, frowning face the Abbot made when he was reading Marco's letter! He wriggled just like a bat when it feels itself scorched with brimstone; and I can tell you it was a real pleasure to see him forced to speak pleasantly when he was feeling so bitterly."

"Indeed," said Lupo, "it has been a great kindness and condescension beyond all measure of that chief—of Marco Visconti."

"It was all for love of our master!" broke in Ambrose; "for our master's sake, who went on purpose to beg it of him, with the young lady."

"I shall always be grateful to the Count," answered the youth, somewhat mortified at finding out that Marco had not thought of him out of his own head, which idea had puffed him up a good deal; "but, first of all, however, I must go and thank Marco."

"He departed last night for Tuscany," said Ottorino.

"Oh, I am so sorry! I would have given anything for the honour of kissing his glorious hand, and assuring him that my life will be ever devoted to him."

Ambrose, on hearing these expressions of enthusiastic gratitude to Marco, understood that his son was still of the same mind, and that the warlike devil had not come out of him, so bending his head down sadly, he said to himself—"If the gallows could not cure him, I do not know what will."

The son read that thought on his father's contracted brow; and it grieved him to have been betrayed into saying anything displeasing to him at such a time, and wishing to make up for it and to prove his filial love,

without touching on points where they could not agree, or giving a promise which he had no intention of keeping, he thought for a moment of what he could say most affectionate and welcome; and at last he asked him after the falcons which he had left at Limonta.

Ottorino glanced at his squire in surprise at hearing a question which seemed to him so out of place; but the father, who had never been able to interest Lupo in a calling which absorbed his whole heart, and in which he would gladly have brought him up, and who had never before heard him voluntarily mention a falcon or a lure, so irksome was the whole concern to him, on account of the very efforts that had been made to recommend it to him, felt strongly the delicate tenderness of the question, and answered: "They are all quite well," and gave a squeeze to his arm, with his eyes full of tears.

When they had arrived at Milan, the young knight said to Lupo: "In a couple of hours you must be at the lists, and you will find me there;" so saying, he waved his hand to his travelling companions, who answered by bending to their saddle bows.

Lupo's welcome may be left to the imagination of the reader. We will only say that his mother, for the first time in her life, found fault with the behaviour of her other son, Bernardo, who began to reproach him with his obstinacy in schism, meaning to infer that to that was to be traced all the evil that had happened to him.

"Come, be quiet!" she said to her pet, with some irritation, "there will be plenty of time to say all that."

Lupo soon asked for news of the family. Beatrice was laid up with an attack of fever. Ermelinda was nursing her sick child.

"And the Count?"

"He is shut up in his room, and does not wish to see any one," replied a page.

"But I must return thanks to him," said the falconer's son.

So mounting a staircase, he crossed five or six rooms, and at last came to the door which led to the master's quarters; and all the rest followed behind, wishing to

share in the gladness as they had done in the trouble. He knocked softly; and the Count, who had guessed who it was, first from the noise in the courtyard, then from the sound of footsteps and the voices he had heard coming through the house, called out from within:

"Go away; I don't want any one here."

"Count! master! your honour! it is I, your servant Lupo; let me kiss your hand."

"There, there, go away; that will do," was answered from within.

"I know that you went yourself to obtain from Marco the promise of my safety; pray, let me in."

"Open the door, we implore you!" cried Ambrose.

"Open the door," repeated Marianna, "so that we may embrace your knees! Let us have that pleasure."

"Open the door!" they all cried at once. "Long live the Count del Balzo, our master!"

He was at last conquered by so many entreaties, and opened the door a very little; then peered out through this small opening, with a face half frightened and half triumphant, which had a most ludicrous effect. Then they all threw themselves at his feet, kissed his hands, thanked him, and wept; but after he had enjoyed his ovation for a few moments, he said to Lupo, withdrawing his hands:

"That's enough; I am glad to see you safe and sound. Now, go away, and take my blessing with you; but remember, never to put your foot again in my house." Then turning to the falconer: "And you, if he does not change his habits, bid him recollect that he has had a very narrow escape of the gallows."

So saying, he drew in his head, and shut himself into his room, leaving them all stupefied and bewildered.

Lupo, not knowing what to make of it, went off to array himself in his armour, and having taken a tender farewell of his parents, he was on his way to fetch his horse to betake himself to the lists, when, in a corner of a passage, he came across his sister Lauretta, who, putting her finger to her mouth, said in a low voice:

"You must salute Ottorino in the name of my mistress,

Beatrice; and tell him to bear himself bravely in the lists for her sake, and she hopes that absence will not cause him to forget her."

"Absence! What do you mean? Ottorino is not going away, as far as I know."

"No; but he is forbidden by the Count ever to come to this house again."

"But why? what's the reason?"

At that moment there were footsteps heard. Lauretta, again putting her finger on her lips, hurried away on tip-toe to hide herself in a room close by; and her brother went off on his own business.

CHAPTER XVI.

LUPO, on his way to the monastery of San Simpliciano, close to which the lists were erected, made his way out of the town by the postern gate of Algiso, now called the Ponte Beatrice.

The inhabitants were hastening from all quarters to enjoy the pleasures of a spectacle so welcome at that time. There was a constant succession of men, women, and children, all dressed in their smartest clothes. You might distinguish among the crowd the wool-staplers, by a white hat and a kind of switch, which they carried. You might discern the master armourers, of whom, in Milan alone, there were more than ten thousand, by an apron of skins of various colours, according as the artificer was a maker of cuirasses, or swords, shields, helmets, or spurs. Among the workmen in the same trade, or school, as they expressed themselves in Milan, you might tell the journeymen from the masters, and these again from the superintendents, the minor officials, the consuls, the abbots.

The knights might be distinguished by their short, silken cloaks, their velvet hoods, their large sleeves turned-up, their scarlet upper garments (long womanish gowns, fastened by a girdle), and ladies by their necklaces, ornaments, crowns of pearls or precious stones; their pelisses of sable, minever, or marten fur—finery and ornaments forbidden to plebeians and to rich artisans, who were obliged to content themselves with fustian, wool, or mixed stuffs; with skins of lamb, rabbit, fox, and other common animals, and were not allowed to wear floating garments, or clasps, or buttons, unless made of bone, brass, steel, or such like common metals. So contrary was the spirit of that age to ours; then, as

infinite trouble was taken to divide ranks as now to equalize them.

When our squire arrived in front of the Church of San Simpliciano, which was at that time, as is well-known to the inhabitants of Milan, some way out of the enclosed part of the city, he saw the people stopping to look at several shields which were hanging there.

It was the custom to expose on some church or some cloister in the neighbourhood of the lists, the insignia of the knights who were to tilt there, because this practice afforded facility to all to recognize those who bore them on the day of the trial; and because, if there was any notice to affix to any of those about to fight, if any lady or damsel had a claim of honour to make, it could be notified in time to the judges of the tourney, who would exclude the accused if the proofs were deemed sufficient, and the case serious enough to deserve that penalty.

Our Lupo, after he had glanced at a shield quartered with red and white, with a viper in the midst, which was Ottorino's property, went on his way; and every step he took, the crowd and commotion increased.

Here a minstrel sang to the notes of his cithern; there a buffoon showed off his dogs and monkeys to the sound of a pipe or drum; further on a mountebank sold relics and charms against fever, praising the miraculous virtues of the herbs of San Paolo and Santa Apollonia; on all sides were to be seen tents, in which were going on games of dice and other special games of that age, called "polveretta" and "coreggiola"—games, which though forbidden by law, were practised every day by cheats, to entrap foolish people. Everywhere were to be seen booths, and sheds, and shops, under which was sold flesh of rams and wild boar, garnished in various ways—wheaten, rye, and barley bread; malmsey and white grape wine, and other kinds of liquor and food.

On the left of the lists there was a large square, where were the war horses and those for the tourney; and then were to be heard the shouts of the grooms, who made them gallop, and caracole, and leap within. Close by, two smaller spaces, divided into many enclosures, were

given up to the market of dogs and falcons. Here the yelps and screams of the animals mingled with the voices of the sellers, who were enlarging on the value of their merchandise.

"A pair of bloodhounds from Tartary, of the true breed, imported into France by St. Louis!" shouted one. "Dogs of blood, race, and bone, who are warranted not to go mad!" "Peregrine falcons and sittings of eggs from England, Germany, and Norway!" screamed another. "A Gerfalcon hawk, the king of birds, taught to seize hares, and capable of attacking the wolf and wild-boar!"

On the opposite side, on the right of the lists, was the market for arms. It was like a camp of tents and awnings of every shape and colour. Within, cuirasses, shields, greaves, thigh-pieces, gauntlets, iron-caps, and lances, and swords, and iron maces, and daggers. In the centre of these temporary shops, the choicest kinds of armour were disposed round a pole stuck into the ground, so as to represent a warrior; in some the knight was on horseback, the caparisons touching the ground; the head-piece, the mail collar, the iron saddle, the crupper (made of the scales of a fish), covered so well the wooden horse and the saddle-tree, that the sham animal might pass for true. In other places two pretended champions were placed opposite one another, and appeared to be spurring against each other, all armed *cap-à-pie*, with lances in rest: there were fantastic representations of encounters and conflicts, all arranged by our armourers as traps to customers, who, principally on the occasion of jousts and tourneys, hastened from all parts to provide themselves with armour at Milan, where were the most celebrated manufactories in Europe. Every booth bore a placard with the name of the master armourer.

"Giacomolo, how goes business?" asked Lupo of a fat, red-faced man, who was standing just within one of these shops, with his elbows leaning on the bar, which was across the entrance, looking idly at the passers-by.

"So-so," answered this individual, who was Giacomolo

Birago, one of the most celebrated makers of breast-plates; "taking into consideration the bad place I have got, and the season, I have not done so badly."

"Have you sent that cuirass to Ottorino?"

"Yes, I took it to him this morning, and he tried it on, and looked quite a picture; I tell you, it is a splendid piece of armour—a thin plate of metal to resist a dagger—tempered by my own hand; and I have adorned it with golden arabesques on the chest, so that I declare to you, not only because it is my own work, but for truth's sake, that Biassono and Pier degli Erminulfi and Estore Casato would have given their heads to get possession of it."

Just then there came up an old man covered up in a long maroon-coloured robe, with a hood on his head, the peak of which was tied round his neck, and said to Giacomolo:

"Master, I want a morion of the first quality, with a closed visor."

"Do you mean by that, fastened down over the face, and opening behind?"

"Exactly."

"Those are old-fashioned articles, and I do not keep them. The morion now is made with a visor, to move up and down at the wearer's will. If you want those, I have them of the best kind. Look here," and so saying, he went towards the middle of the shop; but the other said to him:

"No; do not disturb yourself, master. I only want the shape I spoke of; and where can I find one?"

"You could try yonder—the fourth or fifth shop counting from mine. Can you read?"

"No."

"Well, you can't mistake; only ask for Ambrogio Caimo, and any one will direct you. Perhaps he may have them, for he keeps antiquities. If you don't find it there, you will have to go without."

"And how much should I pay for it if I find one?"

"Well," answered Birago, drawling his words and shrugging his shoulders, "it is like asking how much a

relic is to cost; it may be more or less, according to the devotion of the buyer and the conscience of the vendor."

"Excuse me, if I have hindered you," said he of the long robe, and went on his way.

"What kind of morion does he want?" said Lupo, resuming his conversation with the armourer.

"They are morions," answered Birago, "which were used once on a time, and were worn by persons who wished to fight at a tourney, and remain unknown; for, being all in one piece, there was no danger that a stroke with a lance should raise the visor and discover the combatant's face."

"Ah! I understand. Now tell me some news. The Viceroy is not yet arrived, is he?"

"No; they are running at the quintain. As soon as he comes the tourney will begin."

"And is he keeping them all waiting?" returned Lupo.

The armourer only answered by compressing his lips and shaking his head at the same time; but, after an instant, he lowered his voice, and said:

"You see what sort of people they are. If only it had been Marco!" And here he heaved a long sigh.

"Oh, if it had but been he!" answered the Limontese, sighing in his turn.

"But why does he go away?" continued the armourer, in a still lower voice. "He ought to stay here, where we are all devoted to him; and as to our own guild, from the chief to the youngest boy, we would all go through the fire for him."

"And the soldiers!" said Lupo, enthusiastically; "and the nobility! and, indeed, all; but who knows what reason there may be for his going away. I, for one, hold that it is not so simple as it appears."

Here the colloquy was interrupted by the appearance of the man in the long robe, who was coming back with a morion in his hand.

"Well, my good man!" cried the armourer, "did you find it?"

"Yes," the other answered, coming up and giving him the helmet to examine, which he carried on his wrist; "I found it where you told me."

Birago opened it, looked it minutely over, inside and out, and then said:

"It is an English make; and how much did Caimo make you pay?"

"Guess."

"Eight silver pieces?"

"More."

"An imperial lira?"

"More still."

"Come, tell me then—tell me. I can't go any further."

"I paid two gold florins."

"Gold ones?"

"Yes, golden ones, and one was thirty imperial pence."

"What a thief!" the armourer began, but he bit his tongue, and restoring the morion to the unknown man, added, "I must say, that whoever has two florins to throw away on these old bits of iron must measure them by the bushel."

"In whose service are you?" asked Lupo, innocently and unceremoniously of the unknown; but he put his fingers on his lips, and went off by the way he had first come.

Our two friends followed him with their eyes till he had disappeared among the crowd; then the armourer said to the other:

"This is for some one to wear who wishes to appear incognito at the joust to morrow."

"If I was not waited for," said Lupo, "I should be curious to follow him, to see where he is going to take the queer old thing."

A customer now arriving to purchase from Birago some kind of dagger, he, raising the bar, let him into the shop, and the Limontese, seeing him immersed in business, went on his way.

After another journey through the crowd, he arrived at last at one end of the lists, divided by scaffolding and wooden turrets of various heights on the side of the city,

and by a simple barrier on the opposite side, which was towards the woods.

Lupo entered, and saw the boarding covered with garlands and flags, adorned with carpets, silks, cloths of gold and silver; saw knights, and ladies, and gentle damsels sitting in front, and further back squires and foot-pages: everywhere he saw plumes wave, hats and hoods tossing, and weapons and jewels shining. A large balcony, with pillars hung with white satin worked in gold, still untenanted in the midst of such a concourse, was intended for the Imperial Viceroy and his court; here shone above in beautiful embroidery the serpent below and the black eagle above, the crests of the Visconti and the Emperor.

In the middle of the large space of ground within the barriers, there was placed on a pillar a half figure of an armed warrior, with a shield on its left arm, and a large and solid lance on the right; and to strike at this figure was the ambition of any one who could get a horse to mount, and who wished to show off, and this was called running the quintain, or running the Saracen, for the figure was dressed in the Moorish fashion. At that time, and for long after, this game was a popular enjoyment, and also a school of arms, in which the youth were trained to aim only "*fra le quattro membra*," as they expressed it, that is to say, at the breast and head of the adversary, which were the only strokes counted fair and loyal. The lances to be used had to be submitted to the umpires of the quintain, and were all of the same length and thickness; and whoever broke the largest number, and whoever made the best thrust were hailed as conquerors.

But it was best of all when the figure did not receive a fair thrust with the lance, for then a spring was touched, when, by means of certain ingenious, hidden weights, it was made to turn violently upon its pivot, and to deal the inexpert champion a series of unexpected blows.

At the opposite end of the lists from the quintain was placed another wooden horse which we must describe. A post as thick as the trunk of a tree was planted in the

ground, on which, by means of an iron swivel, a beam was laid crosswise which swung round at the slightest touch. A man on horseback, riding at full tilt, had to strike one end of the beam with his lance, and the art consisted in avoiding, by rapid riding, the counter blow dealt by the beam as it swung round on its axis. This game was often highly perilous, and had, on that account, in common with the jousts and tourneys, been forbidden by bishops, popes, and councils, but bishops, popes, and councils spent their breath in vain; they might as well have preached to the winds.

Lupo had presented himself before Ottorino, had fastened on him Birago's new breast-plate, had given a most minute examination to every part of the armour, looking again carefully at the horse, the caparisons, the panoply; and when he had ascertained that everything was entirely right, he entered the squires' pavilion, placed at one end of the lists, and from there stood to observe those who were running the quintain. Just then he saw a man come up dressed from head to foot, half in red and half in yellow, so that, seen from the right side, he was all one colour, but seen from the left, another: a fashion that was common in those times; but it was unusual to see it accompanied, as it was, in the person of whom we are speaking, by a row of silver bells which hung all round his hat; and which rang at every step he made.

"Welcome, Tremacoldo," said our squire, when the other had come near enough for him to recognize in him the buffoon, by whom the arms had been blessed at the ordeal by battle.

"Is it you, Lupo?" answered the mountebank; "I am so glad to have found you: I was coming to the squires' tents to see if any one would lend me a breast-plate and a horse to run a bout at the Saracen: so, perhaps, you will do me this kindness?"

"Do you mean to ride at the Saracen? You are in joke. I advise you to mind what you are doing, for it is not quite the same thing as singing a song. Look at that partisan in his hand! He has dealt many blows with it at people less inexpert than yourself."

"He may strike whom he pleases, I don't care, for I have got a wager with Arnaldo Vitale: he carried away the palm in a minstrels' contest, and I have challenged him to a contest at the Saracen."

"But do you not know that Arnaldo Vitale is a squire, and that he understands charging with the lance as well as the first jousters?".

"But you do not know the terms of the challenge? He has to break his lance on the Saracen, and I am to conquer by only touching it, without being struck by the stick in its hand."

"So it is not, then, to be on equal terms?"

"Equal terms! No, you won't catch me at that. I may be mad, but I am not mad enough for that yet."

"And are you not ashamed?"

"Of what? to gain without trouble a fine horse?"

"And what do you wager?"

"I wager a piece of that gold chain which your master gave me at Bellano; the rest I have lost at the gaming table."

"Poor chain, and your poor shoulders; well, do as you please."

"So, you will lend me this horse and this breast-plate?"

"For one trial only."

"That is understood."

"Well, come inside, then, and I will put you up to everything."

Having arrayed him in a light corselet with his trusty rest fastened to his chest, Lupo mounted the buffoon on his own horse, and put into his hand a lance. "This is only for practice," he said to him; "drive the thrust from there," and he showed him the rest. "Remember to keep your knees tight, to bend forward in your saddle, so that the blow does not throw you from your horse; so, a little more this way, hold the lance tight, throw out your arms more; try to strike in the right place, and recommend yourself to your patron saint."

"Leave it to me," replied Tremacoldo, and departed at a trot towards the middle of the arena.

"Wait to put on your spurs," Lupo cried.

"I will do without," answered the buffoon, and did not stop.

A trumpeter making the round of the barriers announced the challenge between Arnaldo Vitale and Tremacoldo, and then the terms in which it was couched. Everybody knew how feather-brained the challenger was, and therefore prepared to behold some sample of his folly.

When the pledges were placed in the hands of the judges, two grooms dressed in bearskin, and imitating in their movements the animals they represented, approached the competitors to present to each a lance; but while Tremacoldo was stretching out his hand to take his, the horse he rode pricked up its ears, dilated its panting nostrils, snuffed shyly and fiercely at the bearskin, then, starting back, reared up, so that the poor rider very nearly was thrown off on the ground; he saw himself in danger, stuck his knees into the saddle, and threw his arms round the neck of the infuriated animal. It was fortunate for him he had no spurs on, and Lupo, arriving at that crisis, took hold of the horse by the bridle, calling him by his name, caressing his head, patting him on the neck and side, and made him soon as quiet as a lamb.

When the laughter roused by this incident had subsided, the herald cried in a loud voice: "Call Arnaldo Vitale."

And there was the troubadour, who, quite clothed in armour, with a bright cuirass and the silver spurs, the distinctive mark of a squire, now sped across the field, threw himself on the Saracen, and struck it right in the centre of the shield with such an impetus that the whole machine shook, and the lance was broken in pieces. This was the third that had been broken that day, but none had yet struck the "brocco," that is to say, the iron point which was in the centre of the shield, called on that account "brocchiere;" and so it was decreed this was the best thrust.

The herald shouted, "Imbroccato," and there was a general sound of applause.

In another moment the multitude began to cry out, "Now for Tremacoldo; it is Tremacoldo's turn."

"I am here, I am not going to run away," replied the buffoon.

"Quick, put your lance in rest," said Lupo, who was standing at his side, and was acting *buriasso*, as they expressed it, at that time, and as we should say, *padrino*; "quick, turn the horse, and give him his head." But the cheat, who did not care to run a desperate race for nothing, had already thought of a trick to get out of it by an artifice; and instead of putting the lance in rest, he passed it under his arm, and started off towards the goal, all of a heap in his saddle, tossed up and down like a sack of potatoes, so that he was a sight to see.

Arrived at the goal, he gave a thrust with his lance, immediately entangling it in the folds of the purple mantle in which the figure of the Saracen was draped. It was not a fair blow, and consequently the lay figure, unaccustomed to such treatment, revolved with a sudden noisy motion on its pivot, and the staff which it carried in its hand seemed about to fall with a furious blow on the back of the inexpert rider. Everybody expected to see the jester knocked clean off his horse on to the ground, but he, aware of the peril, as soon as he had given the thrust with his lance, had flung himself prone on the horse's neck, so that the staff only caught the top of his hat, whirling it away to an immense distance amid the delighted jeers of the multitude. As soon as he had got out of reach of his enemy, Tremacoldo, with a sly laugh, raised himself from his cramped and prone position, seated himself upright in his saddle, turned his horse's head, and rode back again straight up to the figure of the Saracen, which had now resumed its customary attitude with its staff once more stiff and steady in its hand, and proceeded to accost it with taunts and gibes, and the various ludicrous grimaces proper to his jester's calling.

"You idiot! you thought to play me a trick, eh, you dog? but Tremacoldo is too old a bird to be caught with chaff."

"Tremacoldo," said one of the judges of the quintain, "according to the terms of the wager, you have lost."

"How can I have lost if the stick did not touch me?"

"Look at your hat on the ground, which bears witness against you," replied the judge.

"What has my hat to do with me? my hat is a tricky fellow, and if it takes it into its head to go tumbling on the ground, is it my fault?"

The judge was going to reply, but Arnaldo Vitale now broke in, pleased with the success of his stroke, and came between them, saying:

"Tremacoldo is right; we spoke of his person and not of his hat;" then, turning to the man himself: "take the horse, which is yours, and which you have fairly won."

The bystanders were all pleased with this courteous conduct, and they all agreed to praise the brave and generous troubadour, to whom was unanimously decreed the prize of the quintain: a sword with a silver hilt.

In the meantime, the Imperial Viceroy, Azzone, had arrived in company with his uncles Luchino and Giovanni Visconti, and a numerous and splendid court of barons, squires, and pages. He had hardly shown himself to the people, than there arose a few cries of—"Long live Azzone! Long live the Viceroy, the Lord of Milan!" But it was a cold demonstration; a dull murmur soon drowned those voices, and, at last, from some spots was to be heard a clear and distinct cry of—"Hurrah for Marco!" so that Luchino, after having looked round, bent down to his nephew's ear, and said:

"It is lucky for us that we have got rid of him for some time."

The Imperial Viceroy was dressed in a long rich robe of flowered damask, closed in front by a row of gold buttons. A strip of ermine, not more than three fingers wide, was passed across his forehead fastening a piece of black taffeta embroidered with silver stars, two ends of which came squarely down to his ears, whilst the back part fell on the shoulders in the shape of a cap or hat;

a lordly fashion, which made the face appear square, and set off the complexion to advantage.

Naturally gentle and pleasant, Azzone made still more show of kindness and courtesy in order to win over the populace, who he knew were not too well inclined to him; he therefore leant half out of the balcony to answer the saluations of the barons and knights who were nearest to him; waved his hand and bowed to every artisan, every poor woman who made obeisance to him; courtesies which cost the great nothing, and which are so valued by the lower classes.

Azzone, having caught sight of Arnaldo Vitale at this moment, took his own sword from his side, and presented it to the judge of the quintain, and buckling on the one that had been gained as a prize, turned to one of his squires, who was standing behind his gilded seat, and said to him:

"Attend to me, Lampugnano; go down into the lists, and bring me that troubadour who won the prize of the quintain."

While the young man was obeying his orders, the Viceroy said to his two uncles, between whom he was:

"While they are clearing the ground, and the champions are preparing for the tourney, we will have some singing."

Luchino made an indifferent gesture; but his brother Giovanni, who, already a bishop, had just been made a cardinal, and who was devoted to show and pomp, and all the luxury of the secular life of that time, asked his nephew:

"Tell me if this is the Arnaldo Vitale who, a few years ago, won at Tolosa the prize of the golden viol, offered by the seven patrons of the gay science."

"The very same," answered Azzone.

Then the prelate began to tell wonderful things of him, for he had heard him praised in all the Courts of Italy, and knew some of his songs by heart; Luchino's look of contempt had not escaped him, and having often reproached his brother for being rough and ill-bred in the polite arts, he began to make a long eulogium on

troubadours and minstrels; how to be friendly with them brought you reputation and glory; how the people delighted in them above all things; how Marco owed in part his great popularity to his liberal ways with these singers. In short, he worked the subject threadbare.

At the time of our story the troubadours, minstrels, and jesters who swarmed all over Europe, were, for the most part, an idle race, who, roaming from country to town with a lute or cithern round their necks, attended all festivities, visited every palace and city, and excited the foolish prodigality of nobles and princes. In times when the communication between towns and provinces was slow and difficult, they carried about the news of public events and private affairs: a great deal of slander and gossip; the latest fashions in weapons, tourneys, and love affairs; they sang of the glories, and betrayed the foibles of the great. Often they praised vice to the skies, and dragged virtue through the mire, according to their fancy or the pleasure of those who paid them. Base and servile instruments in the hands of the rich and powerful; while among themselves, in their eager emulation, they fought, and strove, and quarrelled, often coming to blows and bloodshed. In a word, they led the life of a dog, now receiving a piece of bread from the hands of their employer, and now a kick, just as occasion served.

Among this rabble might be found, however, some honest men, and some good poets, and Arnaldo Vitale was certainly one of them.

He appeared in the Viceroy's balcony, dressed as a troubadour, for he had laid aside his breastplate and other armour, and had arrayed himself in a doublet and leggings of blue and white. He wore on his head a square blue cap, with two white feathers, which shaded his left cheek. He appeared to be about thirty years of age; with his head covered with rich, soft, chestnut locks, and a calm and rather stern expression of countenance.

The party in the Viceroy's balcony drew round him at once, and those in the neighbouring erections stretched

forward to hear him. He looked round the noble circle, and then bowing to Azzone, asked him for a subject.

"I have often heard my father," said the Viceroy, "who was in France for some time, recall the adventures of one Folchetto di Provenza, who, though only the son of a smith, became Count of Narbonne, and then died a friar in a Spanish convent. You will know all the particulars, as you have been in those parts, how will it suit you to sing me this history in verse?"

"I will do all that is in my power to obey, though I am but an unworth instrument in the hands of so great a lord," answered Arnaldo; and hanging round his neck the lute which he held in his hand, he touched the cords, and said—"I must supply the tune and the words," which would mean in our modern language—improvise both music and poetry.

Then he began by soft preludes to prepare the listeners for that description of emotion which he wished to arouse by his verses; and in the meantime he appeared absorbed as one meditating, turning his eyes upwards, and his cheeks glowing, his brow seeming to expand to his imagination; his whole being was agitated by the internal workings of his mind. There was a deep silence, all were looking at the poet with respectful attention; and now, accompanied by a soft melody on the lute, he began his song in a voice at first not quite assured, but which soon became most pleasant and sweet.

No rose, whose fragrance sweet and fair,
The summer suns diffuse,
Can vie with Fulk, the gay young Page
Of Raymond of Toulouse;
Of doughty deeds, and true of heart,
Nor yet unskilled in Minstrel's art,
The sweetest lay to choose.

Oh! could you see this gallant youth
Upon his dapple gray,
Ride straight into the tournament,
In battle's proud array;
St. George scarce seemed a truer knight
When, after long and fearful fight,
He did the Dragon slay.

But if with sad and tuneful notes
His plaintive song is told,
While round his face the fair hair floats
In locks of curling gold;
There seems, before our startled sight,
An angel form, all bathed in light,
Not one of mortal mould.

No knightly court of high repute
But bids him welcome free,
No village maid but softly sighs
His graceful form to see;
But faithful Fulk, to share would scorn
The homage to his master sworn,
And to his fair ladye.

Of Salamanca's proudest line
She comes, and Nelda hight,
With hair and eyebrows black as jet,
And face of marble white;
Nor does Toulouse's town contain
A lady of more high disdain,
Or one more fair to sight.

His eager love the lady spurns,
And puts his suit aside,
"Methinks he savours of the forge,"
So spake her scorn and pride;
"The daughter of a baron born,
Would think it shame and foulest scorn
To be a menial's bride!"

The luckless Page, his bitter fate
Lamenting day by day,
Sings to his harp her praises sweet
In song and roundelay;
Her favour, still withheld, to gain
By feats of arms he seeks in vain,
And breaks a lance each day.

Then like a flower, parched by heat,
Doth perish from our sight,
From out his face there seemed to pass
The colour fair and light;
And slowly doth the youth expire
Before the glance of burning fire,
Shot by those eyes so bright.

Death would have seized him for his prey,
But to the rescue came
His right good liege, who dubbed him knight
Without reproach or shame;

Of Narbonne made him Count and Lord,
And for his bride did him accord
The fair and haughty Dame.

Now fierce prepares the din of war,
From Toulouse camp the battle's roar
Comes sweeping o'er the plain:
Hath not the Lord of Provence sworn
To crush the rebel with his scorn?
Nor will he swear in vain.

Each knight is there in full array,
High flutters every pennon gay,
Towards Antibes they make their way,
Resolved to lay it siege.
And Fulk, who rode him by his side,
With mournful looks did Raymond chide,
"Grieve not o'er thy forsaken bride,"
So spoke this courteous liege.

"Too soon from thee thy love was ta'en,
And hastening o'er the Narbonne plain,
A horseman fleet now speeds amain,
To bring her to thy side."
The day broke with auspicious morn,
Alas! there rose another dawn,
A third day, yet a fourth were born,
And in succession died.

No Nelda came—his hopes were vain,
Nor was the horseman seen again
On fruitless errand sent.
Now yields to terms the captured town,
The rebel flag is trampled down,
And struck is every tent.

Fulk from his vassal duties freed,
And mounted on his gallant steed,
His steps rejoicing homeward turns,
And all day long in spirit yearns
His castle fair to see.
When turning from the path aside,
Amid the olives he descried
An humble hostelry.

And there, to his astonished sight,
Pacing a lofty terrace height,
Where dash beneath the billows white,
And toss their spray on high;
A lady wrung her hands and wept,
While, o'er the sea, she steadfast kept
Her fixed and straining eye.

None can mistake that haughty air,
There breathes no other maid so fair,
The look, the form, the dress declare,
That he discerns aright.
'Tis Nelda, from his horse he springs,
O'er the arched neck the bridle flings,
But round his thoughts suspicion clings,
And trembling with affright,
"Nelda," he cries, "my wife, my own,
Say wherefore thou art here, alone,
And in so sad a plight?"

Her countenance of ashy-white,
All streaming loose her hair,
She wreathed her trembling lips to form
A smile of last despair;
Then turned, and calling up her pride, [cried.
"Stand off, now mark my farewell words," in accents fierce, she

"The glory of an ancient line
Was humbled to the earth,
When I was made to wed with thee
A churl of peasant birth.
True knighthood can no liege bestow,
Unless the gentle blood be there, through purple veins to flow.

"Could I such deep dishonour bear?
I scorned the insult vile,
And summoned to avenge my cause
A knight from Britain's isle.
Ah! faithless wretch—how false his aid,
One morn, his ship's departing sails, to my despair displayed!

"Twice the sun's declining rays,
And twice the dawn I saw,
Pacing with sad and weary steps
Along this unknown shore,
A spectacle for all men's scorn.
Ah! woe betide the hapless day that ever I was born!

"Now what remains? A suppliant
To thee, whom I despise;
Shall I a pardon ask of one
All hateful in my eyes?
No, let the abject crawl and sue,
Be mine a different fate—my father tell—adieu."

She spoke, and, from the terrace height,
One headlong leap she gave,
Her flying form an instant seen,
Then plunged beneath the wave.
And all along the lonely shore
The fatal fall, the bitter cry were heard, then all was o'er.

For straight upon the cruel rocks
Dashed her fair form and frail,
She sank—but to the surface rose
Her white and flowing veil.
And there, with stain of crimson dyed,
Appeared the circling waters of the white and foaming tide

Not e'en a tear was shed,
Never a word was said
By that proud knight, so dread
In armour clad.
And without more delay,
By the shore took his way,
'Lone wand'ring all that day,
Silent and sad.

Loud the winds roar and rave,
Curling each angry wave
With lofty crest so brave,
High the spray threw.
Onwards the ship doth stand,
Whence, gazing on the strand,
To his fair native land
He bids adieu.

Through the cold northern blast,
Straight flew the ship, and fast,
At length her anchor cast
On Britain's shore.
And there, in mortal fight,
Thus to avenge his right,
He met the traitor-knight,
With challenge sore.

Quicker than lightning's glance,
Each couched his trusty lance,
While the steeds neigh and prance,
Champing the rein.
Forward in mortal shock,
Lance with lance there doth knock
Firm stands each steed as rock,
Till one is slain.

Now on their feet they stand,
Each waves aloft his brand,
In close fight, hand to hand,
Gallant their bearing.
Helmet and shield may tell
What cruel blows there fell,
Long fought the knights, and well,
Reckless and daring.

Then, his revenge to gain,
Fulk, his great wrath and pain,
In himself doth contain,
And with his might,
One final thrust did deal,
Making the traitor feel,
That in his heart the steel
Had entered quite.

And death, his pallid hue
Over that visage threw,
Terrible once to view
In wrath and pride,
Vainly the bleeding wound,
Pressed with his hand, he bound,
And slowly, to the ground,
Tottered and died.

Then, while he sheathed his sword,
Still speaking ne'er a word,
Did the avengèd lord
Gaze on the slain.
Yet though, o'erspread his mien
One glance of triumph keen,
Ne'er will his smile be seen
Ever again.

Where Spain's extremest confines rest
Upon a mountain's lofty crest;
Whose base, firm-rooted in the deep,
Fair Provence fronts with shaggy steep,
The Cloister rears its silent shade,
By pious Bruno built,
Haply from his grief-stricken head
To wash the stain of guilt.

A chosen few assembled there,
In sackcloth clad, on frugal fare,
In penitential prayer and fast,
Are still content to dwell.
Strict rules, which all their lives must last,
And this they know full well.

Hark! to the bell, whose solemn sound,
Bids vaulted roof and arch resound,
While round an open grave are seen
The Monks, whose sad and mournful mien,
Their inward grief confessed.
Who is that dying man? declare!
Stretched on the stony earth and bare,
His arms crossed o'er his breast?

Lo! where the torch's flickering light
Reveals a well-known form to sight,
'Tis Fulk of Narbonne, lord and knight,
  Now at the point of death.
White as the frost or driven snow,
His hoary beard doth downward flow,
Still o'er his aged breast descends,
E'en past the girdle's cord extends,
  And with each long-drawn breath,

Which bids his bosom heave and swell,
In gentle cadence rose and fell
  Like waves upon the shore.
But in that last and solemn hour,
One fatal image still hath power
The buried past again to raise,
And fix once more his longing gaze,
Still mingling with each dying thought
And calm repose, so dearly bought,
  By penance long and sore.

Once more her hov'ring form appears
With pallid face, all bathed in tears;
Her dark hair, o'er her shoulders cast,
Wild, loose, and streaming to the blast,
  His fair and faithless love!
Ah, holy man! and doth there rise
A tear unbidden to thine eyes?
Why weep'st thou? 'Tis a last farewell,
(Thy grief I understand too well,)
That form, once loved, can never dwell
  Among the Saints above!

CHAPTER XVII.

NOTHING could exceed the enthusiasm aroused by this song. The Viceroy rose up from his throne, sprang forward to embrace the minstrel, and after overwhelming him with praises, said to him: "As you have been reduced to go on foot through your own courtesy, I cannot let you leave my dominions in this mean way; so I hope you will for my sake accept of a palfrey and a travelling nag as guerdon for your minstrelsy." On this he turned to an attendant, and after ordering him to have the two horses got ready at once, told him, in a whisper, to add thereto a rich dress and a liberal sum of money.

The cardinal then drew from his forefinger an emerald ring, and placed it himself on the finger of Vitale; and Luchino, not to be outdone, presented him with a small dagger with a richly embossed gold handle. Their example was followed by all the knights present at the spectacle, who vied with each other in offering him different presents; while the fair ladies, dames, and damsels, alike enchanted by his marvellous skill, all pressed round him offering him some token of approbation, and accompanied the gift by such kind words and gestures, as to enhance his appreciation of it a hundredfold.

We feel sure our readers will think all this praise very absurd of a song, which they would, no doubt, consider a very poor performance. But we must beg them to remember that it is one thing to sit in a room book in hand, conning over the words of a composition in black and white; and quite another to hear it furiously declaimed by the bard's own lips, as he utters the words

with flashing eyes, aided by the enchantment of an harmonious voice, and accompanied by the ever-varying tones of the lute, to suit the sentiments expressed by the words, and all this amid an excited assemblage of youths and maidens, where the feelings of each listener are excited by what he sees going on around him, like single sparks of fire which gradually unite in one grand conflagration.

The minstrel had scarcely departed, when Azzone took his seat on the dais, which was the signal for commencing the tournament. The arena had already been cleared of the populace, who had been allowed to go in and out at will as long as the quintain and the other games had been going on; the bars had been let down inside the lists, and a herald rode round uttering at each of the four sides of the arena the following proclamation.

"Oyez! Oyez! Oyez! This is the proclamation of the high and mighty Lord Azzone, Viceroy of his Serene Majesty, the Emperor of the Romans. Let no one dare to enter the lists during the tournament, or to favour or disfavour any of the combatants by deed, word, or sign, under pain of forfeiting horse and armour, if the offender be knight or squire; of losing an ear, if he be artisan or labourer; a hand, if he be a slave, and his life, if he be a knave or a felon."

This done, the six judges of the tournament, clad in long silken robes, took their seats in a gallery near the Viceregal box, in front of which a banner was displayed, embroidered with gold and scarlet quarterings.

Not a sound was to be heard in all that vast multitude; the parapets of the towers, the galleries and boxes were crowded with spectators, while the barricades round the lists, where no seats had been erected, swarmed with people surging and treading one upon another; and all eyes were directed in turn to the two opposite ends of the lists, where two pairs of magnificent tents had been pitched, those on the Viceroy's right being scarlet, and those on his left white.

But now a flourish of trumpets was heard, and from the two white pavilions issued forth twelve knights clad

in white surcoats, with white plumes in their helmets, and the same number of squires, with green stripes on their doublets—while from the opposite pavilions came an equal number of knights and squires with red surcoats and plumes, and yellow livery respectively.

At the head of the white troop was our friend Ottorino; and the red one was led by a young Milanese warrior, by name Sacramoro. The two parties who were to fight with blunted lances, arms of courtesy, as they were called, now advanced slowly towards each other, and stopping before the Viceroy's box, saluted him by lowering the points of their lances.

Their richly-caparisoned chargers had iron horns on their foreheads, and rows of bells suspended from their breast-plates. Each knight had his family colours emblazoned on his shield, in all sorts of fantastic devices, with his crest and past feats of arms, so as to be better distinguished in the *mêlée*. Besides this, each man wore a strip of taffeta, of different colours. Some carried it fastened on their side, others on their shoulder-belt; it was called the lady's favour, as it was, or was supposed to be, a gift from the knight's lady-love, towards whom, according to the rules of chivalry, every one had to turn his thoughts before engaging in any dangerous enterprise, so as to give himself courage to come out of the affair with honour.

We said above that these were either real or pretended gifts between lovers, because all knights could not possibly have been really in love, or at any rate have met with a sympathetic damsel; but as in those days the absence of love in a knight was in itself a crime, not to say downright irreligion, those who were not in love pretended to be so, and those who had no lady-love's colours to be donned, invented some for themselves, and left the lookers-on to exercise their conjectures.

The fact is that the passion of fevered love had arrived at such a pitch with these knights, that they made a point of yielding to no one in this particular, and it was quite common for some blockhead to go about armed *cap-à-pie*, from one country and one court to

another, challenging every knight he met to single combat, unless he confessed at once that his opponent's lady-love was the most beauteous and most virtuous damsel in the world, and his love for her the most unfeigned. Then the witless idiot would on this flimsy pretext unhorse, wound, and kill other fools like himself, until he stumbled across someone with a harder head than his own, who, with a good sword-cut or lance-thrust, did him the pious service of knocking his folly out of his head by sending him to fertilize a cabbage garden.

When chivalry became extinct, that elegant device of pretending to be ardently in love descended, in Italy at least, to the poets. Hence arose that legion of affected, tiresome, woebegone imitators of Petrarch, who so long inundated Italy with sonnets and canzonets addressed to the eyes, the mouth, the foot, the hand, or the complexion, and so on, of innumerable Queens of beauty, one lovelier than the other. Luckily, poets are a quiet race, and generally do not make war on more than their neighbour's listening powers—otherwise it would have gone hard with our poor ancestors.

But to return to our story. After saluting the Viceroy, the two companies wheeled off to right and left, till they arrived at their respective ends of the lists, whence they again returned halfway down the course, halted, and mutually saluted each other. Their noble chargers champed their bits, as if eager for the fray, while their riders with their visors down, and lances erect, came forward in a serried mass with their respective leaders slightly in advance. Their helmets, cuirasses, and shields, adorned with gold and silver badges, gleamed brightly in the rays of the mid-day sun, while the housings and caparisons of their chargers flaunted out to the public gaze as they turned along the course, and plumes, banners, and streamers floated in the wind.

Our knowing armourer, as soon as he saw the arrival of the Viceroy, left his shop in the charge of an apprentice, and ran to the left side of the barrier near

the two white pavilions, where his wife was expecting him.

A place had been kept for him by half a dozen of his workmen, who cleared a way for him as soon as the plumed cap of the master armourer was seen above the crowd, so that he was soon seated by his wife's side, his elbows leaning on the barrier.

"Look, it fits him like a glove," said Birago to one of his young men, pointing to Ottorino's cuirass, who was just then passing in front of them.

The young man was on the point of answering, but the armourer's wife interrupting him, seized her husband's arm, and asked him, saying, "Tell me, Giacomolo, who is that knight, the third in the ranks? is he blind of one eye that he keeps it bandaged like that? he looks too smartly got up for fighting."

"His sight is as good as either of ours," replied the armourer; "I know him well: his name is Bronzino Caimo, one of those Caimi who once lived at Saint Ambrogio, and now reside near Broletto Nuovo; I will tell you the history of that bandaged eye. He once made love to a lady of the Lampugnani family, who would have nothing to do with him, he was such a poor simpleton; so, in order to get rid of him for a while, she gave him to understand that she could not bear the sight of a booby whom no one outside our walls knew anything about. She told him this in somewhat politer terms than these, but it came to the same thing—so what do you think the poor fool did? He laid wait for the lady as she was walking one evening in her garden, plumped down on his knees before her, and taking one of her hands, shut his own eye with it, and then swore never again to open it till he had unhorsed three knights; and that he would never again appear in her presence but with two eyes open, that is, till he had fulfilled his vow."

"What curious vows!" exclaimed Birago's wife—"and do they still bind him?"

"Certainly they do, and on the strength of them, even he has become a man of some mark, and goes about the

country picking quarrels in all directions. The consequence is, that he has been unhorsed no end of times. Once he had his shoulder put out, another time he came home with a broken arm, and a third time with his ribs stove in; but on he goes, storming and hammering away, till in the course of three years or three years and a half, he has just managed to unhorse two of his knights; and as he never misses the chance of a fight, here he is again, and if he succeeds in emptying a third saddle, he will unbandage his eye and present himself to his mistress, who cannot then do less than permit his addresses."

Meanwhile the band of red knights came trooping past our couple. Its leader, Sacramoro, displayed beneath his helmet a visage well bronzed by the sun and set off by a pair of truculent eyes—his mouth and left cheek were disfigured by a deep scar extending to his chin—while his broad chest and shoulders made him look very formidable, as he rode forward on a fine dark brown Macedonian charger, with the careless mien of a man accustomed to face far greater dangers than these.

"Look! look!" said Birago, pointing him out to his wife, "there goes one of the first lances in the Milanese; he has seen service in Germany, France, and Palestine."

"I prefer the leader of the white knights," replied the lady. "He seems quite as good a man as the other, and certainly looks more of a Christian."

"He is a noble young fellow, too," said her husband; "he, too, was fitted out at my armoury; but I can tell you that fellow Sacramoro will give him a tough bone to crack."

"But why do those two men," asked the lady, pointing to the white knights, who were drawn up in a line in front of the pavilions, "carry shields of one colour without any quarterings?"

"That means, that they are novices; in default of some special act of prowess, they are bound, for the first year of their knighthood, to wear their shields in that fashion, of a single colour and smooth—But hush! they are going to begin."

At the first sound of the trumpets, the knights, who were drawn up in lines at each end of the lists, all lowered their visors together; at the second, they placed their lances in rest; and at the third, both parties, uttering their respective cries of San Ambrogio, and Ottorino, and San Giorgio, and Sacramoro, set off at full speed from either end, and encountered each other in the middle of the arena with a noise like thunder. In a moment you saw lances shivered to pieces, knights unhorsed, horses charging each other breast to breast, or biting and striking out with their forefeet, and then galloping off all over the course with empty saddles and dangling reins; while from the *mêlée* arose a cloud of blinding dust, from which proceeded a confused mass of cries of triumph, rage, encouragement, and command. Soon after grooms came running up to catch the loose horses, squires to assist their lords to remount, and inferior attendants to help some disabled man out of the *mêlée;* while the outside of the lists resounded with the exclamations and applause of the spectators, who were eagerly asking which side had got the best of it.

The knights now discarded their lances, and drew their swords, called *di marra* because they had neither point nor edge. They were formidable weapons, however, and when brought down on a helmet by arms that knew no other trade, quite heavy enough, if the blow was well aimed, to break the head inside, or, at least, to make the wearer stagger dizzily about for a good while. Meanwhile the heralds, umpires, and clerks of the course, who kept vigilant watch on the combatants to see that they fought fairly, and did their duty, were incessantly calling out to them to remember whose sons they were, and not to show themselves degenerate.

The combat lasted rather more than an hour with varying fortune; but at last the white party seemed to have had the worst of it. Four of them had been borne to the tents severely wounded, while their comrades, hard pressed by the enemy, continued slowly to retreat. The Viceroy, thinking it was all over with them, and wishing to avoid further bloodshed, was on

the point of giving the signal that the fighting should cease, when Ottorino, calling Beatrice and her message to mind, and burning with rage and shame, threw his shield behind him, clutched his sword desperately with both hands, and charged the leader of the red party, crying out: "Look to yourself, Sacramoro!"

The threatened man at once threw up his broad buckler over his head, and directed an ineffectual sword-thrust at his adversary's cuirass. The latter, however, seeing from his opponent's style of defence that a direct blow at the head would be of no use, lowered his sword instead of raising it, and making a furious cross cut, struck Sacramoro on the right cheek-piece of his helmet with such force that he was knocked clean off his horse, and had to be carried off to the red tent with a broken jaw, and little more than alive.

On this, hearing Ottorino's battle-cry of San Ambrogio, the defeated party took heart, while their hitherto victorious adversaries lost courage and began to give way. Our young hero, meanwhile, dealt sweeping blows around with loud shouts, and was well supported by his companions to the utmost of their power. In an instant the whole aspect of affairs was changed; two more of the red faction were unhorsed, while those who still kept in their saddles, deprived of their leader as a rallying point, wandered about the lists in disorder, continually pursued and wounded by their adversaries; and as it was now plain that all further defence was useless, the Viceroy gave the signal, the trumpets sounded, and the tournament came to an end.

While the crowd outside was uttering various cries, clapping their hands, and throwing hats and handkerchiefs into the air, by way of applause and welcome to the victorious party, seven or eight of the heralds and umpires were seen to ride at full speed after one of the red knights, and drive him out of the lists with the butt-end of a lance; a punishment always inflicted, according to the laws of the tourney, on any one who did not at once cease fighting, when the signal was given

Such of the combatants as were able to sit upright in

their saddles, or stand on their legs, presented themselves one by one, as their names were called out by a herald, before the judges' box, and according to the testimony borne by the various officials of the tourney, it was adjudged that all had comported themselves like good and loyal knights; two only excepted, one of the white faction, who was charged with having run his lance into his adversary's thigh, which was a foul stroke, as not having been placed between the four limbs, as the saying ran; and the other, one of the red faction, accused of having wounded a horse. As to the first, however, he was cleared from blame by the very man who had received the wound, who proved that the thrust was really aimed at his shield, but that the lance-head glanced off and struck a different part from what was evidently intended. The other managed to escape by getting one of the clerks of the course to swear that his competitor's horse raised its head just as he was delivering his sword cut.

The last names called were those of the men in the tents, of whom there were ten; seven wounded, and three dead—and it was decided that they had all comported themselves in a worthy and valiant manner.

But the most unlucky of all the wounded men, without having received very serious maltreatment, was our friend Bronzino Caimo, the hero of the bandaged eye. At the first encounter, a lance point penetrated through the opening left in the visor to see through, right into the unbandaged eye, which was the only one he could use. So being thus blinded and unhorsed, he was led off to the tent, where nothing could induce him to allow the bandage to be removed from the other eye, which still remained sound. The matter was then referred to the judges, who did not know how to settle it; and for some time afterwards it afforded a subject for hot and acrimonious discussion among the knights and ladies, who called it a pretty question—just as we sometimes hear a barrister say, this is a splendid case—or a doctor, this is an interesting disease. Every view of the case had its ardent supporters; they quoted the Roman and

Mosaic Laws, Latin and Provençal authorities, prophets and romance writers, philosophers and troubadours, adducing precedents drawn from the histories of the seven sons of Ammon, of Amadis de Gaul, of Girone il Cortese, and in fact, of every famous paladin of England or France that ever existed. The question was laid before all the principal Courts of Love in different cities of Europe, and was decided in all sorts of ways, till on a final appeal to the Supreme Court of Provence, after the subject had been solemnly and exhaustively argued by divers learned pundits, sentence was at last given in favour of Caimo's eye, namely, that he might be allowed to unbandage it. So after about three years, during which time he had remained totally blind, our timorous lover at last removed the fatal bandage and saw daylight again; on which he returned to his former avocation of trying to unhorse his third knight in fulfilment of his vow (see how constant they were in those good old times). At last, by good luck, he knocked his man over. What joy! But you will hardly believe that his wretch of a mistress, who did not care to be attended by a one-eyed lover, got off on another tack, and told him coolly, that his promise was, not to appear in her presence again but with two eyes open, and as he now had but one, she did not want to see him again.

But let us return to the lists. The novice knights, according to the laws of the tourney, presented the heralds of the camp with the helmets they had worn in the field; but here arose a new difficulty, inasmuch as one of the said novices had broken a lance in a passage of arms held at Como a short time before, and there were some who pretended that he was not required to give his helmet to the heralds, as this was not his first feat of arms. It was however decided that the helmet was due, because the combat in which he had taken part before was only a skirmish, that is, a joust, in which the sword was not used; and the famous maxim was now enunciated with respect to jousts and tourneys, that the sword frees the lance, but not the lance the sword.

The white faction were declared to be the victors, and

the votes having been collected not only of the judges and officers of the tournament, but also of the ladies and damsels, it was decided that Ottorino had proved himself the most valiant knight, and the prize was adjudged to him—viz., a white charger, with white trappings, and a silver helmet and shield, and so the day's work came to an end.

Our armourer's wife was so delighted, and so proud of the renown of such a noble-looking young man, as she called him, that she never ceased talking of him, till at last her long-suffering husband began to grumble and fume, and almost to swear at her.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE news of the tournament and its results was brought to the Count Balzo that evening by the advocate Lorenzo Garbagnate. Beatrice, who felt half dead with the fright of the night before, and the misery of the whole of that day spent in conjuring up all possible dangers for Ottorino, listened with intense anxiety to every word, and derived new life from what she heard; like a flower, which drooping from the heat of the previous day, raises its head when revived by the fresh dew of the morning. But when she heard how the young conqueror, after his victory, reverently kissed a blue riband hanging from his side, as a proof that the thought of his lady had mainly contributed to his success, the girl, full of love for him, and fairly broken down by her joy, withdrew a little from the crowd, and covering her face with her hands, gave full vent to her tears. After her return to the company, she often that evening felt her cheeks tingle at hearing the beloved name in every one's mouth; and murmuring to herself, "He is mine!" her bosom swelled with maidenly exultation.

With all this, she could not help ever and anon looking at the dark side of the picture, remembering, as she did, how her father had forbidden her ever to see her lover again, and feeling sure that must be on account of Marco; but these fancies soon vanished before the fulness of her joy, like summer mists before the rising sun. Proud in the consciousness of loving and being loved by one now so renowned, she felt just then as if misfortune was impossible; hope told its flattering tale to the maiden's willing ears, and a thousand gilded castles in the air floated before her imagination.

The knights and ladies assembled that evening at the Count's house, were greatly surprised at his non-appearance at the tournament; and in the course of conversation allusion was made to Bronzino Caimo's eye, in the hope that it would afford an opportunity to the Count of indulging in his favourite pastime of arguing and laying down the law; but unluckily his thoughts were so absorbed in other matters that he did not rise to the bait.

Marco's face seemed ever rising up before him; his words were ever ringing in his ears; in fact, so overwhelmed was the poor man by the idea of Marco's omnipresence, that he was utterly incapable of sharing his daughter's delight at Ottorino's victory.

But by degrees his spirit and courage began to return, and soon after an event occurred that finally dissipated the dark clouds that still hung over him. This was the arrival of an old baron of his acquaintance, who took him aside at once, and informed him that the Viceroy had been inquiring for him. Some of us may have seen a poor jaded horse with downcast head and drooping ears, who can scarce be forced along by dint of lash and spur, when suddenly the driver deals him a couple of kicks on some old sore, and off he goes like a two-year-old. Just so the start the Count gave as this unexpected news changed the current of his thoughts, and at the same time his whole demeanour.

"What! did he really ask for me?" anxiously inquired the vain, timid man.

"He wanted to know where you were."

"But what was his actual expression?"

"He asked why you were not at the tournament?"

"Then I must certainly attend the joust to-morrow; that is the day fixed for it, is it not?"

"Yes, the jousting is to take place the second day, and I think you had better go; for if not, perhaps, you understand as you are such a friend of Marco's, it might be thought possibly that you are not friendly to the Viceroy."

"How! what do you mean?"

"Oh nothing in particular; but everyone knows that between Marco and the Viceroy there is no love lost."

"I know nothing of that; I am a friend to all, and wish to live at peace with everybody."

"That is just why you must go to-morrow; it is a *fête* to celebrate the appointment of Azzone; and if he happened to ask for you again, and found you were not there—"

"Oh, I will come, you may depend upon it."

And, sure enough, the next day he appeared before anyone else in a balcony hard by the Viceroy's box; the lists had not yet been put in order, nor had the combatants arrived, but there stood the Count as large as life, with his daughter and a large suite of squires and pages.

When the Viceroy and his two uncles showed themselves in their box, the Count tried to attract their attention by taking off his hat, bowing and waving his hand, but no one took any notice of him, or seemed to distinguish between his civilities and those of the rest of the spectators, which struck him as somewhat strange. When they were all seated, he kept wagging his particoloured beard, winking his little grey eyes, and chattering as loud as he could in his harsh cracked voice, in order to attract attention; but every one seemed absorbed in watching a couple of dogs which ran howling round the arena, and this did not materially improve his temper.

The joust now commenced; several knights came forward to touch the different shields hanging up near the pavilions of the champions. A number of single combats then took place, but nothing occurred worthy of notice; some of the knights ran a tilt in the air, others lost a stirrup, and so on.

Ottorino was not once summoned into the lists, for after his exploits of the previous day, no one cared to measure weapons with him.

The spectacle had now lasted two hours, and was becoming so dull that the lookers-on were quite weary and disgusted with it, and soon began to grumble and

curse the knights for not having the courtesy to show sport. An Italian mob is usually good humoured enough, and easily managed, so long as no one interferes with its amusements; if you do, you will soon find the beast has claws and can use them.

It having now become necessary to appease the many-headed, unruly monster, the heralds came forward crying out that the joust would now cease, and proclaimed a *bigordo;* such being the name given to an assault on a bastion or wooden castle, which was one of the favourite military spectacles of the time. But just as they were about to utter the formula used to put an end to all challenges, the sound of a horn was heard issuing from a wood close by. The spectators knew that this portended the entrance of a new knight into the lists—and they were not mistaken; for, after a short interval of silence, there entered through the barriers a tall large man, with his visor down, clad *cap-à-pie* in steel armour, but colourless, and devoid of any ornament or device; he bestrode a large coal-black stallion, with a white star on its forehead, and three white stockings.

The new comer had suspended on his saddle-bow a shield, as smooth and plain as the rest of his armour, but behind him rode a squire with another buckler, covered with sombre-coloured silk as a badge of mourning. This latter individual, leaving his master at the end of the lists next the wood, crossed the ground to convey the shield to the judges' tent, which was pitched on the opposite side. The judges were bound by a solemn oath never, on any pretence, to reveal the secret of any knight who might wish to fight *incognito*, but they were equally obliged to examine his coat-of-arms, and determine whether he deserved the honour of measuring weapons with the other champions.

While this was going on, an uneasy and inquisitive feeling ran through the expectant crowd, which showed itself in a continual buzz of voices in an undertone. This ceased as the squire entered the judges' tent, and was succeeded by a no less eager silence.

Shortly after the judges came out with the buckler of

the unknown knight, which had been again covered up; and after hanging it on the head of a lance fixed in the ground, they did obeisance to it, and gave the sign to a herald, who cried, with a loud voice, "Sir knight, you are free of the lists."

This permission obtained, then the unknown knight passed down the enclosure at a foot's pace till he came to the tent of the keepers of the lists, when, stopping before Ottorino's shield, instead of touching it, as usual, with his lance, he pulled it down from its place and threw it on the ground; he then hung it up again, but topsy-turvy, which was the greatest insult that could be offered to a knight, and meant a challenge in *tutto transito*, or in other words, to mortal combat.

Various reports now began to circulate amongst the spectators, who had watched these proceedings attentively, well aware of their import. Vague guesses were made as to who the challenger could be, and what was the cause of such violent hatred. The older men said that the Viceroy ought not to have permitted the challenge, while the young men exclaimed that it would have been outrageous to have prevented it. Not a few trembled for Ottorino, while others among his partisans were glad that he had a chance afforded him of distinguishing himself afresh. Others again, envious of his fame, rejoiced in secret over the mysterious peril that threatened him, and hoped to see the lowering of a renown that threw their own vanity into the shade; while the mass of the bystanders, tired of doing nothing, and utterly indifferent to either party, were glad they were going at last to have something fresh to look at.

But what must have been poor Beatrice's feelings all this time? She who at the commencement of the tournament, while the combatants were engaged in striking each other's shields, half wished, half dreaded, that Ottorino's shield should be touched, gradually regained her composure, at seeing so many bloodless assaults, and at last ardently wished for some occasion for her knight to show off his prowess; although not without some misgivings, she already felt a foretaste of his victory, antici-

pating the congratulations of the knights and ladies, and her father's silent, but ill-dissembled surprise. But when she heard the blast of the trumpet, and saw the unknown knight arrive, she was struck with a secret foreboding, and trembled from head to foot, as she seemed to hear a voice within her crying out, "Woe to thy betrothed!" So while this terrible knight was crossing the lists and drawing near the pavilion, she kept looking at him with the panic fear of a child, who thinks he sees a ghost coming slowly at him in the dark; every step he took seemed to take away a bit of her life; when he arrived at the extremity of the lists, she could scarcely draw her breath, and when she heard the shield fall to the ground, her eyes swam, and she hardly felt in her senses.

Her father observing this, and wishing to get her away from so severe a trial, took her by the arm and tried to persuade her to leave the scene; but the wretched girl, thinking it was better to see the affair out with her own eyes, than to wait at a distance for news of the result, with a mind ever expecting the worst, refused to follow him.

"Do you not know whom the person challenged is?" said the Count in an agitated voice.

"I do, it is Ottorino," replied the girl, resolutely, as she had now recovered herself, and remained firm to her determination.

"But the arms," stammered her father; "but the challenge—"

"The arms are pointed and edged," replied Beatrice, gathering courage from despair. "The challenge is to mortal combat, I saw it all; but I will not stir from here."

Meanwhile Ottorino had issued from the tent armed *cap-à-pie;* he came up to his charger, which Lupo held for him, placed one hand on the saddle-bow, and heavily weighted as he was, with one spring vaulted clean into his saddle.

The umpires then brought two pointed lances, with ponderous oaken shafts bound with silver rings and iron

butts, and having carefully examined them to make sure that they were exactly alike in every respect, they presented one to each of the combatants, ordering them at the same time to make the circuit of the arena.

The two competitors riding side by side, each with his squire behind him, now began to look around them, as they passed the barrier in front of the spectators. The unknown knight, thoroughly concealed by his armour, guided with a gay and careless air his powerful charger, which excited by the shouts of applause, kept rearing and plunging, and champed impetuously its foaming bit; its rider meanwhile maintaining a firm and upright seat in his saddle, with a stern majestic carriage which was not however devoid of natural grace.

Lupo, who rode a little behind him, was awe-struck at the magnificent breadth of his shoulders, the fine proportions of his limbs, and his proud, noble bearing, and could not help feeling some apprehension for his master's safety. On a closer observation of his armour he observed that the visor of the helmet was *nailed down*, and recognised it as having been purchased the day before at the shop by the old man with the maroon-coloured robe.

Ottorino cantered along by the side of his gigantic opponent, with his visor up, which displayed the clusters of black hair playing about his fine open countenance. He bestrode a beautiful chestnut jennet from Andalusia, which, though not so massive and formidable as his antagonist's charger, yet was full of fire and intelligence, and obeyed at once his master's slightest sign, whether of hand or voice. His rider managed him with great skill, making him prance and curvet so gracefully as they moved along, that you would suppose they were going to a review or carousal, rather than preparing for mortal combat.

On arriving opposite Count Balzo's box, Ottorino courteously saluted both father and daughter, but the former scarcely seemed to see him, and even Beatrice only responded with a shy and fugitive glance, for at

that moment, as if urged by an evil genius, she could not take her eyes off his mysterious adversary. As she looked at his sharp and glittering lance-head, she seemed to feel the cold steel in her own heart, and kept her eyes upon it, as if she wished to mesmerize its influence.

The unknown challenger, who had ridden with his eyes straight before him, inclined his head slightly towards the gallery where the Count was sitting.

When the combatants had completed the circuit, the ground was cleared for the contest, and the earth and sun, as the saying was, were equally divided between them; that is, they were placed opposite each other in such a position as to be both equi-distant from the centre of the arena, and so that the sun's rays should shine at equal advantage and disadvantage for both of them.

The immense crowd in the boxes, or close to the barrier, or else perched on benches and temporary stands in the rear, or on trees and housetops in the further distance, awaited the combat in silence. Not a heart was there that did not palpitate with impatience, envy, hope, or fear; and the trumpets were about to give the signal, when an event took place that all but overthrew the tottering power of Azzone.

Lupo, who stood behind Ottorino, taking a chance motion of the Viceroy's hand for a signal for the assault, cried out in a voice loud enough to be heard all over the arena, "Viva Marco Visconti!" which was his master's ordinary war cry, who hearing it, lifted his gauntleted hand and repeated it himself. However, neither he nor his opponent attempted to move, as they had not yet heard the trumpet sound; but the spectators, most of whom were secret adherents of the Visconti faction, and had a hazy idea that there was something in the wind, supposed that that cry was a preconcerted signal for a rising against the Viceroy. In an instant thousands of voices took it up from all directions, while numbers felt for their arms, and collected in groups, asking what it all meant, and looking round to find some leader as a rallying point. If Marco had shown himself to them just then, all would have been over. The small body-

guard of the Viceroy drew together around his box, and for a moment both he and his two uncles, Luchino and Giovanni gave themselves up for lost.

While the tumult was at its height, the great unknown, who had never moved from his post, raised his hand to his helmet, and seemed to be trying to raise his visor, as if forgetting that it was nailed down; but the movement must have been involuntary, as he lowered his arm at once, and placing his closed fist on his iron thigh-piece, he stood contemplating the stormy scene through the eyelet holes of his helmet.

Meanwhile the heralds and officials of the tournament ran about crying out to the people to keep silence, and go back to their places; till by degrees the tempest began to blow over, and at last passed off altogether; the fierce young men, who were all eagerness for the fray, the timid ones who did not wish to stay and be caught in the crowd, and the gapers, who made more noise than any one else, and formed the majority, at last returned to their places, some grumbling, some laughing, and all asking what had been the matter.

When silence was restored, the trumpets sounded, and the two combatants advanced towards each other, with their heads bent down behind their shields, leaving nothing visible but their eyes.

But the unknown knight, who intended to strike a dexterous blow with his lance at the first onset, instead of spurring his horse and urging him on at easy pace, put him at once into a mad gallop, and when he came within reach he presented his shield sideways to his adversary, who attacked him with such fury, that the lance, on striking it, glided off from the polished steel without leaving any mark, and merely grazed his side in passing; while he himself, looking fixedly at the blue scarf which Ottorino wore that day over his shoulder, ran it through with his lance and succeeded in pulling it right off his back.

This preconcerted and masterly stroke was not properly understood by the spectators, who, supposing it was done by accident, began to grumble as if it had

been a foul blow. But the two competitors no sooner had passed each other than they wheeled their horses round, on arriving at the point whence they had originally started respectively, and again furiously charged each other. The unknown knight came on this time at full speed, and pressed his knees so tightly into his charger's flanks, that it could scarcely breathe. When they came together, Ottorino broke his lance on the edge of his adversary's shield, who did not move in his saddle, but struck the young man straight on the visor with such force that he felled him to the ground a whole lance's length from his horse, which, feeling the load off his croup, stopped all of a sudden and looked round, as if expecting his master to remount. But his unlucky master lay on his back on the sand without a sign of life. Lupo at once leapt from his horse, tremblingly opened his visor, and found blood flowing from his nose, mouth and ears. Two attendants came out, took off his helmet, and carried him in their arms to the tent; his legs were hanging loose, and his head swung about at every step, with his bloodstained locks floating in the wind.

In a few moments a herald came out of the pavilion and exclaimed that Ottorino was alive.

On this the victor, who, still ensconced in his helmet, had accompanied the wounded man to the tent, and had remained near at hand ever since he saw him go in, raised his hand to Heaven, and sat upright in his saddle in an attitude signifying his delight at hearing the announcement; then throwing down his lance, he set spurs to his horse, and galloped out of the lists into the wood whence he had come. His squire, having taken the shield with the lance to which it was fastened, carried it behind him.

When the lance thrown down by the knight who had disappeared, was picked up, it was found that the iron head was broken off. Most people thought that this had been done in the encounter, but there was one man who had noticed that the unknown knight, on first hearing his adversary call out, "Viva Marco," had gone up to one of the boxes, stuck his lance head between two

boards and using the shaft as a lever, had broken it off halfway.

Everybody agreed that if the lance had been whole, the force of the blow was such, that it would have pierced the visor, and gone right through the head of the wounded man.

CHAPTER XIX.

HERE we must suppose a month to have elapsed; and we will transfer the scene of our story to the city of Lucca, which had in the meantime become subject to Marco Visconti.

The Emperor, forced to abandon Tuscany, as his own schemes and those of the Antipope had all failed, before finally taking leave, had endeavoured to wring all the profits he could out of that country; and among other fine plans, one of the most feasible had been to sell cities friendly to him for ready money. This amiable scheme was especially applied to Lucca. The faithless Bavarian had taken it away from the sons of Castruccio, his powerful partizan, in order to give it to Francesco Castracani degl'Interminelli, who paid in ready money for it, a wonderful number of thousands of gold florins. But the people of Lucca, who did not approve of having been bought and sold like a flock of sheep, deserted the Emperor's cause, and had thrown themselves upon Marco's protection, who had arrived some time before at Ceruglio, and had gained over that band of revolted Germans, so that he was at leisure, and able to make what use of them he liked. Visconti arrived with six hundred soldiers to aid those of Lucca, sent Castracani to the right about, and was elected himself lord and captain of the city which he had delivered from an odious yoke; of a city which gave itself up willingly to a prince of illustrious birth, of distinguished reputation, who had been a close friend of the famous Castruccio, under whose government Lucca had become so powerful and formidable.

The sixth day since that event had now arrived. Marco was still employing his followers in receiving the

voluntary submissions of many of the estates and castles around, and in overrunning, devastating, and burning those that had refused obedience; and already he had entered into a new compact with Count Fazio, to commence at Pisa the same game he had played at Lucca, and to take that city out of the hand of Messer Tarlatino di Pietra Mala, to whom the Bavarian had given it up.

The morning of the sixth day he had spent in receiving and despatching messages to the potentates and municipalities of Tuscany and Romagna, who were looking on with varying feelings of envy, fear, and hope at the rise of the new prince, whose hidden intentions it was so difficult to devise. The rest of the day was passed in rejoicings and receiving homage, which the multitude is never loth to accord in the case of a new power. His ears still rang with their acclamations, which had echoed through the streets of Lucca, as he had passed through on horseback, followed by the chief men in the city and those of the different trades, on his way to the Church of San Martino, to worship the Volto Santo.

It was now late, and having taken leave of the counsellors and nobility of his new Court, Visconti was pacing up and down a vast hall in the palazzo of the municipality, inhabited a few months before by his celebrated friend Castruccio."* He turned his eyes from time to time towards a Gothic window which looked on the square, from whence he could see towers and domes shining with a brilliant light; far below, in the square, a bonfire spread abroad a red and flickering flame over the people who swarmed around, feasting, revelling, and singing lays and ballads in praise of the new chieftain; further away, on the hill-tops, many beacons were lighted, and everywhere might be heard a concert of bells chiming merrily.

Marco stopped for a moment to gaze on this spectacle —as a bridegroom might contemplate at a festival, the gay and sparkling beauty of his young bride the first day

* For the Life of Castruccio Castracani, see "Machiavelli Istorie Fiorentine," Vol. I., pp. 131, *et seq.*

of his nuptials; and then turning from the window he raised his eyes to a picture of Castruccio, which hung on the wall above the chimney, and this sight spoilt all his pleasure and dispersed the enchantment. He approached a couch, sat down, and then still gazing on the image of his friend, alive such a short time before, he said to himself:

"At Rome, when he was the right hand of the Emperor, full of life and vigour; when all the Guelph cities, and King Robert, and the Pope, trembled at his name; when I was so proud of being his friend, and hoped by his help to obtain the lordship of Milan; suppose a soothsayer had come to him, and said: 'Castruccio, in a few months all will be over, and you will be under the earth!' What an announcement to one fresh in age and strength, in the prime of his power! Yet life is uncertain and frail, and he, of course, knew himself to be mortal; but if that conjuror had gone on to say: 'Do you see him who stands at your side? The man whom you honour and esteem as a brother; this same Marco who has done all in his power to aid you to rise to the height at which you are: do you mark him? Now know that he before long will be lord in your city, that your house will be his, and that your widow and your sons will be wandering from land to land, seeking an asylum which will be denied them, and he will obtain their inheritance.' Oh, what would that proud spirit have answered? What would have been his feelings? and what should I have said? How can one reckon on the future? What a poor creature man is! An illustrious and powerful city falls into my lap in one moment, while the efforts of so many years to make myself master of another, which flies from me like a phantom, are vain. Is it not like an enthusiast, who, while seeking to discover gold by alchemy, comes by chance on some marvellous secret of nature of which he had never dreamt before?"

He went again to the window, remaining some time there looking down upon the square and all around, and then exclaimed:

"Lucca is a splendid city!—but it is not Milan," he added, with a sigh. "To be chief there, where I was only a subject, to command where I was used to obey, to be powerful there among friends who rejoice in one's greatness, to be helped by them—yes, and also to be in the midst of your enemies, and see them gnash their teeth, and to triumph in their humiliation—that is life! Here there are smiling hills clad with vines and olives, splendid knights, gay ladies, riches, polite manners; but these have no charm for Marco's heart!"

While such thoughts were passing through his mind, the people, who saw him standing behind the glass window, crowded beneath, shouting: "Long live Marco!" The train of his thoughts being broken by this noise, he bowed in answer, and waved his hand courteously, then withdrew impatiently, and going into the next room, he exclaimed to himself:

"Stupid, senseless people! You are afraid, I suppose, lest you should find yourselves without a master. 'Long live Marco!' and what do you hope from your Marco? and who is he? and how do you know that he is able to do, or wishes to do, what you hope for? What rejoicings are going on! They would be enough to celebrate the victory of Altopascio.* Oh who can trust in your fickle applause? It would once have intoxicated me, but now I know how short is the interval between Palm Sunday and Good Friday; between the 'Hosannah' and the 'crucifige.'"

A page now approached the door, and on obtaining leave, came forward with a very low bow, and gave to Marco a packet of letters, saying:

"Despatches from Lombardy. The courier is below in the red saloon: he says he is a retainer of yours, and is called Pelagrua."

"Let him wait," replied Marco, dismissing the page with a gesture.

He then approached a lamp, and began to look over the superscriptions of the letters, throwing them down

* Machiavelli Istorie Fiorentine," Vol. I., p. 131.

one by one on a table, as he recognised by the handwriting from whom they came. At last he came upon one, the sight of which caused him to start with surprise, ring a silver bell, and ask the page, who appeared instantly:

"These were not all brought by one messenger?" pointing to the letters.

"All by your retainer," answered the page; "except one which was left at the palace by a courier, who immediately pursued his journey on the way to Rome."

"Very well," said Marco, and the boy went away.

Then Visconti, throwing on the table the last letter, which he had retained till then, said to himself with a bitter sneer: "My magnificent nephew! Is not this a piece of condescension?" and then taking up one of the letters he had first glanced over, he opened it, and began to read it. It was from Lodrisio, his counsellor. Since the day when Marco had left Milan, this individual had constantly been keeping him informed of everything that had happened. Every week a courier was on the road with his letters and Marco's replies written in cipher, as had been agreed between them, to conduct their intrigues, and to shape their behaviour according to passing events.

As soon as it became known that the Emperor was turning towards Lombardy, Lodrisio began to entreat Marco to follow him with the rebel Germans from Ceruglio, and fall on the rear of the Imperial army—a plan which he had already himself conceived—while Lodrisio undertook to raise Milan, and to go out to meet him with the city troops, who were always ill-affected towards Azzone, and did not wish on any account to receive the famished and thievish troops of the deceitful Emperor. But at that time Marco was not his own master. The rebel soldiers of the Ceruglio were not yet so entirely won over that he could feel safe in leading them to fight against the person of their natural sovereign; and, on the other hand, he had already some idea of the affair at Lucca, which, at that time, he only looked upon as a means of procuring a large sum of money, to spend in making the Germans more docile and obedient.

But, as often happens in the affairs of this world, that moment having been lost, when all was ripe—a critical moment, which should have been caught flying—the face of things had very much changed; unexpected chances had arisen which no one could foresee, because they were not brought about by human counsel, which had destroyed in Milan all the machinery of the conspiracy.

The enthusiastic affection which the populace had felt for Marco was by degrees diminishing, now that he was no longer dividing among them his largesses, and that he was not seen riding about Milan as before; handsome, noble, and courteous, in the midst of a splendid retinue of knights and squires; they no longer heard accounts of his banquets; his pungent, witty remarks, treasured up by his intimate friends, no longer passed from mouth to mouth, till they became proverbs among the lower classes.

The chief among the Lombard cities who favoured him secretly were also discouraged by seeing things going so badly without his taking any decided part, and there were many who for some time had not been too well pleased with certain eccentricities in which Marco had indulged since he had plunged into that frenzy of love, the cause of which was still unknown, but of which some new proof appeared every day.

He still received great assistance from the ecclesiastics sent by Pope Giovanni to support his cause; but they at the same time, when they saw that their ally did not stir from Ceruglio, and that in the meantime the Bavarian was advancing by forced marches towardy Lombardy, felt the necessity of making friends with the other side, if they did not intend the cause of the Church to be entirely ruined in those parts, and themselves to fall into the hands of Azzone; who, if insulted when he was weak, would revenge himself as soon as he found himself strengthened by the forces of the Emperor.

The ecclesiastics found it very easy to attach themselves to the new cause, for if the future was dark for them, it was not much clearer for Azzone. He had

heard that the emperor was advancing towards Lombardy with an undisciplined and mutinous army, in a state of supreme indignation with him, partly because he had not yet paid in full the sum promised for his investiture, and partly because he suspected that he was in league with Marco to prevent the people of Ceruglio from returning to their allegiance. So the new lord of Milan trembled, as did also his two uncles Luchino and Giovanni, before that angry, avaricious, faithless man, who had betrayed all the Ghibellines of Italy, and had caused the Visconti to pine for many months in the prisons of Monza; and they could not bear the thought of being again in his power.

In such a state of affairs a reconciliation was easy enough. In fact Azzone made the first overtures towards the clergy, let fall a few words of submission, and they received him with open arms. His first step was to declare positively against the Bavarian, and to do his best to wrest the territory from him. In this way the new lord of Milan found his safety in the very means that had been prepared for his ruin; for having formed an alliance with the Church, all the forces, which so long had been exerted against him, were now suddenly ready to his hand for his defence.

Marco had been kept informed of all these events from the beginning: Lodrisio's letter told him how Milan was fortifying herself in all possible haste and excitement to resist the emperor; how Monza, Lodi, and many other cities and fortresses, had sent word that they would suffer themselves to be destroyed to their foundations rather than open their gates; and that, as to their own intrigues, this was not the time to go on with them, for now all parties had assembled round Azzone to resist the common enemy. He advised Marco to remain in readiness without declaring for any one, so that if the emperor's forces prevailed, he could regain his friendship by restoring to him his troops from Ceruglio, and obtain the viceroyalty of which his nephew would infallibly be deprived, as the penalty of his rebellion; and if the Bavarian had the worst of it, he might make a merit

with the victorious Viceroy, of having restrained the forces from Ceruglio from falling on him in his straits.

Lodrisio begged of him to be of good heart, for their plots were not discovered, and the reconciliation between the clergy and the Viceroy was far from being a perfect or sincere one; and he implored him to keep alive the intrigues with Cardinal Bertrando del Poggetto, with Avignon, and with Florence, in order to be assisted by their forces, to take up again at any future time the threads of the conspiracy, which were now slackened, but not broken.

When he had finished reading, Marco threw the paper on the table in some displeasure, saying: "What a future of deceit and hypocrisy! It is a hard school to have been brought up in! I was not born for this vile age! Yet—" but without finishing his broken sentences, he opened and read Azzone's letter. The Viceroy informed him also at length of the late events, explained to him the causes which had obliged him to declare against the Bavarian, begged him to employ the German soldiers from Ceruglio, so that they should not reinforce his enemy; and to forward, by his good offices, the proposals of alliance and protection made to various communes of Tuscany and Romagna; lastly, he asked him for advice as to the manner of fortifying Milan.

The other letters from various Lombard nobles were all much to the same effect; excuses for having been obliged by necessity to adhere to Azzone, protestations of fidelity to Marco's cause, all more or less embarrassed, and rather less warm than usual. Marco smiled at seeing the turns and twists by which his old friends sought to conceal their disloyalty; he had had too much experience of human nature to feel either anger or surprise.

"They think I am going down in the world," he said in his heart; "but when they hear that I am Lord of Lucca, and that these Lombard affairs are settled, they will again cluster round me."

Then he sent for Pelagrua, who could scarcely recover from his astonishment at finding his master the prince of such a powerful city, when he only expected to find

him at the head of some revolted troops in a castle in Val de Nievole, so entering the hall, he made a very low bow, and tried to express surprise and pleasure; but Visconti cut him short by asking:

"Did you see Lodrisio before setting off?"

"Yes, he gave me himself the letters I brought you."

"And on what terms is he with the Viceroy?"

"On exactly those he wishes to be; he is in high favour. Only fancy! he is intrusted with the fortifications of the bridge of Archetto, which they say is on the most important side of the city."

"Then the Milanese have decided to put a good face on it?"

"Yes, and to show their teeth also, and good sharp ones they are."

"Tell me how they are off for arms."

"They have emptied all the armourer's shops; day and night they are working at making pikes and lances; there will soon be in use six mangonels, eight big swivel-guns, and I do not know how many *stondegarde*. They are fortifying the bastions, and are placing their big, new, wooden towers; each gate displays its own banner; and when the big bell of the Signoria is heard, every one is to hasten to their ward, so that in less than one hour, forty thousand fighting-men can be on the walls."

On hearing these words, Marco felt quite inspirited, his eyes flashed, his face beamed with gladness and courage. He knew better than any one how this unity of effort and spirit, which animated all the citizens, would, if such a thing were possible, strengthen the popularity of the Viceroy, and disarrange entirely the plots which he had prepared for so long with such sustained anxiety; but the welfare of his native country, the honour of his beloved Milan, were before everything with him.

"Now attend," he said to his seneschal: "I wish you to tell Lodrisio—I have written also to him, but tell him none the less—that he must take care to strengthen the bastions of the Ticinese Gate, where the mills are close to the Tesinello, so that the city may not want for

bread; that he must dam up and turn the water so as to make it pass under the bridge of San Eustorgio; and you are to take care that my castle of Rosate be prepared to sustain a siege lest a whim should take the Bavarian to visit it."

"Then," replied Pelagrua, hesitating, "do you mean to declare yourself openly? Lodrisio advised me to speak to you—"

"I have not asked Lodrisio's advice, and still less yours," said Marco, sternly. "I am sending orders to my estates of Martesan and Castel Seprio to furnish Rosate with men and provisions. Pelavicino will command the men, and you must attend to the victualling; and remember both of you, that you will rue the day if there should be seen in my castle yard the face of an imperial soldier, if only ten of our men are still able to fight, or one bone of the last horse in my stable remains to be gnawed."

The seneschal hastened to answer that he would not fail to obey one of these commands; upon which his master signed to him to depart, and he was going off; but he had not yet reached the door, when Marco changed his mind, and called him back, saying:

"And what news can you give me of Ottorino?"

"He has never been seen in Milan since the day you encountered him in the lists. I know, however, on good authority, that he had himself carried to his fortress of Castelletto, where he spent fifteen or twenty days in recovering; and now there is a report that he has gone to meet the Bavarian, to enter his service."

"That is not true!" said Marco, decidedly.

"And yet I know," answered Pelagrua, submissively, "that other Milanese have joined the Emperor's troops; among others Giacobino da Landriano, and Uberto Bregondio, and Marino Bescapè, and—"

"As many as you like, but not Ottorino, no; it must be a made-up story, and a vile calumny!"

The steward did not venture to answer a word; Marco, after a moment, asked him more calmly:

"And Count del Balzo, is he still at Milan?"

"He is at Milan; he was very anxious to go away to Limonta as soon as the first rumour arrived of the approach of the Bavarian, and the risk of a siege; but a proclamation was issued, that no one was to leave the city; it was feared that if the nobles went off the people would be discouraged."

"And then, Ottorino," continued Marco, "has he not been seen at the Balzo palace?"

"Since the day of the jousting you may feel assured that he has not set foot inside it; for I must tell you, that in order to fulfil the orders you left with me, I gained over one of the Count's equerries; it cost me dear to purchase his good offices, but never mind, he serves me well, and nothing stirs in that house without my hearing of it an hour after."

Marco did not answer, and his knavish retainer went on:

"If, however, you wish to make sure, and settle matters—you can trust to me—I know how things are managed. And Lodrisio also charged me to tell you that your rupture with Ottorino cannot fail to bring suspicion on him—that, in short, the young man knows too much—it's rather risky, and it might be better to silence him."

Visconti, who perceived to what point these venomous insinuations were leading, answered with a cold smile:

"Tell Lodrisio that he may set his mind at rest, that I know Ottorino well, and will become security for his fidelity at all times and in all vicissitudes of fortune. He may hate me—he may wish me dead—but betray me—never!"

"Oh, I never intended—I only said—I will never touch a hair of his head."

"No, beware of it," replied Marco, and was silent for a moment, hesitating, as one who would continue his speech further, and knew not how best to cloak his meaning. At last he burst out suddenly with this question:

"And what was said in Milan of the unknown knight who unhorsed Ottorino?"

"Plenty was said about him. Some declared it was Rusconi's son, others that he was a knight of King Robert's; but the wounded boy, as soon as he came to his senses, told some of his friends that there was no one in Italy but you who could strike such a blow as that."

"But he has not been permanently injured? he is really recovered, is he not?" asked Visconti, eagerly.

"There is not even a scar to be seen. He is as active and blooming as ever, so that the Count's daughter will have nothing to complain of."

"And what news of her?" interrupted Marco.

"Of whom?"

"Of Bea—— she of whom you were speaking—the Count's daughter."

"All I know is, that after the joust, for four or five days she was pretty nearly at the point of death; then her fever returned, and her parents went nearly mad over her, and never left her side, or ceased to nurse her and pet her, till at last they got her round by degrees. She still is, however, in a fractious state—her head stuffed full of spoiled child's fancies; but they are of no importance."

Visconti, at hearing his servant talk in such a familiar and jesting manner about a creature to whom his thoughts never turned without a thrill of deep feeling, could not restrain himself, and raising his voice, exclaimed:

"Take care whom you are speaking of, you insolent hound, or by the Holy Rood, I will give you something to remember it by, of which you will bear the marks as long as you live."

To say this, to point to the door with one hand, and then to put him out, was the work of an instant. Pelagrua, stammering some words of excuse, went out like a beaten hound; and while he waited, thinking that his master might send for him again to take leave of him finally, he began to draw his own conclusions from that sudden burst of temper.

He had always thought, as others did, that Marco only saw in Beatrice an obstacle to Ottorino's marriage

with the daughter of Rusconi; he knew that marriage was desired by him, and from his knowledge of Marco's nature, it did not appear strange that he should have taken it up in so vehement a manner. When he saw him fight with his cousin (and the seneschal was the only person in the secret, for Visconti had made use of him to procure his morion, and to find him a squire unknown in those parts), he thought it was only his way of taking vengeance on the boy for having broken his word. When Marco, before his departure, ordered him to watch if Ottorino ever visited at the house of the Count del Balzo, Pelagrua never entertained any suspicion, or thought much about it; and so he was very far from imagining the impression which his discourse made on his master. But this sudden outburst of wrath served, like a flash of lightning, to clear his mind all at once; he saw that there must be a mystery somewhere; he began to think that Marco might himself have fallen in love with this girl, for whom he showed himself so tender and sensitive; he ran over in his mind all the circumstances in the past which had appeared somewhat difficult to understand, and which, with this new indication, became as clear as daylight.

Marco, when he was alone, sat down at the table and wrote five or six letters, and then again summoned his seneschal, to whom he entrusted them, giving him various instructions as to the manner of remitting them; he spoke to him again of his castle of Rosate and the defences to be prepared there, and then he said to him:

"As for Ottorino, I am determined that he shall not show himself in Milan, and that if he ever does come there, Count del Balzo must not receive him into his house; in any case, you had better keep your eye on him, as you have done, and if anything new happens, tell me at once."

"I will certainly," replied Pelagrua; "but suppose I discovered—it is said already the young lady is betrothed to him, and a wedding is soon arranged; even the father——"

"You must prevent it," said Marco.

"But how? because if——"

"In any case," repeated Marco, "you must prevent it; arrange things accordingly, and let me know immediately," and having said this, he dismissed him.

Pelagrua went out; but as he went, he threw a glance stealthily at his master's face, on which he saw an agitation rendered the more visible by the effort he made to conceal it.

"I understand what you mean; I see it all," said the knave to himself; he went down quickly to the courtyard, mounted his horse, and cracking his whip, soon left the palace behind him, on his way to Lombardy.

As he galloped on through the night, this worthy discoursed to himself:

"Oh, you may be sure I'll keep my eye on him, now I have found the end of that skein, which I thought so hopelessly entangled. Now I understand how it was when he came to me at Rosate, quite upset and beside himself, like a madman, and when he was in twenty minds about going to Tuscany, setting off, and then turning back; as wild as any one I ever saw. And, after all, he is not a boy just away from his mother's apron-strings. Besides, if one was able to say of her that she was a great princess, or a crowned queen, or some priceless pearl! But, no; he must fall over head and ears in love with a little girl in this way, and rave about her as if she were a wonder of the world. It's true she's handsome, but there are as good fish in the sea as she. Then she's a proud, disdainful little creature, and what's worse, she's another man's goods. Oh, I could laugh at the whole affair; and to think of that great man, Marco Visconti! Nothing could be more surprising. One would have thought he was made of other stuff than to fall in love with his eyes shut, and give himself up to such childish folly. He may be as proud as he likes, but let him go his own way, and we shall see if your humble servant, whom he treats as if he were the dirt beneath his feet, will not be able to turn him round his finger, now he has obtained the

clue to his mystery. Oh, I see I can make my fortune out of this business. Plague on it, what a state he was in! 'Take care of whom you speak.' That's what he said. Oh, you great grandees of the earth, how miserably little you are, after all!"

He now urged his horse forward, which had slackened its pace, touched it with his spurs, and continued to meditate as before.

"But what passes my understanding is how, when he had once taken the whim into his head, he ever suffered anything to stand in his way; why did he not at once proceed to extremities with the daring young scapegrace who had dared to rob him of his lady-love? He might have made away with him by a single word; but no, forsooth, and not only that, but he must needs himself take up the young fellow's cause, and fly into a passion if a word is said against him.

"As to Lodrisio, he is wide awake enough, and not blind to his own interest either. He would be glad enough to get rid of his cousin, in order, among other reasons, to inherit his estates of Castelletto, but he would like to find some cat's paw to undertake the job for him. However, I am up to his tricks. I know him well enough. But this one, Marco, does not care a straw for that, so long as he can get Ottorino out of his sight, he does not want anything else. Why, the man is mad, stark mad. He don't wish that a hair of his head should be touched! beware of that! but the match must be prevented! Well, I am his servant; and when the two lovers are about to join their hands, I must rush in and separate them. 'Not quite so fast, noble sir and fair lady,' I must say, 'for my master does not consent to the nuptials!' Oh, it is very different to have to do with Lodrisio! He goes straight on, without scruples, and woe to whoever gets in his way. He will laugh heartily when I tell him of these tender loves. Well, I'll go to him for advice, and in any case I shall be glad to shift the burden off my own shoulders."

While the seneschal of Rosate was making these remarks about his master, the latter had betaken him-

self to rest, but could not find any; and instead, gave the rein to his fevered imagination, which soon overtook his servant, who was galloping to Milan, and leaving him far behind, had now arrived in his beloved city, in the very palace of the Viceroy. It seemed to Marco as if he were already conferring with Azzone and with his brothers on matters connected with the siege. He fancied he was rambling through the streets and squares, visiting arsenals and factories, inspecting machines and weapons, and encouraging with his language and example the citizens in the defence of the walls. But behind these ever-shifting pictures of places, things, and persons, one always remained immovably and pertinaciously the same. Below the many emotions succeeding each other in his heart, there was always one sensation the most lively of all; a sensation more or less distinct, and sometimes overshadowed by others, but always mixing with them and tempering them—a sensation which, in all the confusion of his mind, was, one might say, like the bass in an organ symphony.

CHAPTER XX.

MARCO VISCONTI, fatigued and stupefied by the workings of his mind, forgot himself and his cares at last in a restless and disturbed slumber. In the meantime three soldiers had been chosen out of the body-guard, whose post was the corridor of the palace, to watch in the ante-room of the new prince: two Germans and one Lucchese. Of the Germans, one was from the band who had come from Ceruglio with Marco, and the other was a veteran from the city garrison, who had served under Castruccio. He from Ceruglio had evidently paid more attention to the vintners than to the oil merchants of the district, and fatigued by having spent the day in harrying the villages on the plain of Lucca, had seated himself on one of the low walls which, at that time, followed the embrasure of the windows about half the height of the parapet from the ground, and having placed his morion in the niche opposite to him, slept away soundly, holding, between his legs stretched out before him, with the feet crossed, the butt end of his lance, the point of which rested upon the angle of the slope of the window; and if it were not for the sound of his snoring, he would have looked exactly like one of those Roman soldiers from Pilate's Prætorium, such as one sees figuring in the representations of the Sepulchre during the Holy Week.

The other German stood stiffly upright in front of the door leading into the room inhabited by Marco; and the Italian walked up and down the apartment with long strides, stopping whenever he passed in front of a window, to look gloomily at the bastions of the city, where everything was now quiet and silent. At last he stopped between the fellow-soldier who was on guard and the

one who was asleep; turned on the former a glance half bitter and half sad, and pointing to the latter, said:

"Do you hear, German, how your countryman's snoring? This morning he has been behaving himself like a wolf, and now he is like a pig. What rascals they are to plunder that village! Poor Campomaggiore! I have never been able all day to get out of my nose the stench of that burning. Go on, snore on, you ugly rogue, and rest after your fine doings! To call them rebels! My God! as if they were! I should like to send that beast of a countryman of yours into his last sleep."

"I am German as well," answered the other, "and in that way we come from the same country; but I have fought so many years under Castruccio, that I think I ought not to be looked upon as a foreigner in Lucca; so, Fazio, you had better call me comrade."

"Well, then, if you please, comrade, what do you think of this fine expedition to Campomaggiore, and do you think my Lord Marco ought to have allowed it?"

Just then, the morion, which the German soldier from Ceruglio had carelessly and hastily thrown on the parapet of the window too near the edge, being shaken in some way, happened to slip down, and rolled to the sleeper's feet, who was disturbed by the noise, and hearing the others mention Marco, he joined in their conversation in order to appear awake, and said, in his hoarse gruff voice:

"What are you saying of Marco?"

"We are saying," replied Fazio, angrily, "that what you did at Campomaggiore was scoundrel's work, and that Marco ought to have strangled you all, before giving you leave——"

"Giving us leave!" interrupted the German—"I like that! We depend on him, do we? It is like the hand having to ask leave of the glove to hit a blow with its fist!"

"You are set up indeed," returned the Italian. "Any one would think, to listen to you, that you were the captain and Visconti a soldier's boy, a——"

"Who says that Marco Visconti is a low fellow?" said the other. "He is a soldier such as there are few left, and now that Castracani is dead, I hold him to be the first leader in Italy; but that has nothing to do with a man wanting his leave before setting to work to secure his booty."

"It has this to do with it," broke in the other German—"that the captain of a troop has the command of his men, and soldiers who do not want to be taken for marauders must remain under discipline."

"Well, our discipline is arranged in this way," replied the first man: "As soon as we get our pay, and the bit over promised us for coming down here, then we are the masters, and Marco is only Lord of Lucca, because he is our chief."

"Then, if Marco is your chief," returned the German belonging to the garrison, "don't you depend on him?"

"How dull you are!" answered the other, "he is our leader, and he is not our leader; we have elected him for a very good reason, to give in to popular prejudices, because if a troop goes about without a leader, and without deafening everybody's ears with trumpets and drums, they are called marauders; but if the marauders are in correct ranks, with somebody in front with a gold chain round his neck and a rolling-pin in his hand—if one of them bears a dish-clout fastened on the top of a spear, and there is a great row with trumpets and fifes, then they are warriors, and people are respectful to them, and throw their doors wide open to them."

"But what interest can Visconti have in agreeing to this bargain?" asked Fazio.

"What interest?" replied the German in surprise. "Why, of course, the interest which moves the whole world. Those pretty yellow things which make white appear black, and black white, which stir the old man and steady the young one, which——"

"Have done with all this balderdash," struck in the Italian. "Marco Visconti influenced by money! so generous and liberal as he is—a man like him!"

"Yes, certainly; even worthy men are often found

searching in the mud for pence!" replied the Ceruglio soldier. "I have seen them often enough obliged to shovel up the coins out of the ditch, no matter how, so long as they could get hold of them. Not that I would accuse Marco of stooping so low as that, though he wants money all the more, just because he is so generous and open-handed. And then sometimes occasions do arise when great leaders are obliged to fling their gold away without stint. For instance, supposing there is a fair lady in the case, who entirely occupies their thoughts to the neglect of their warlike concerns; and then, all of a sudden, an immediate onslaught has to be made on a neighbour's property, the leaders must make it worth their soldiers while, more especially if the owner of the coveted property does not seem inclined to part with it."

On hearing this, the Italian felt his temper rise, but not wishing to make an uproar, he took a turn about the room as if he wished, by exercising his legs, to subdue his feelings, and when he again felt calm, he turned back to continue the discussion, by saying:

"Which glasses hold most, I wonder, those belonging to the landlord of 'Canovetta,' or those of his rival at 'La Gattajuola?' for to judge by your language, you must have given both a fair trial, I should imagine."

"Look here," replied the German; "I do not know anything that touches my heart nearer than my purse; but, notwithstanding, though I am not easily caught myself, I always find out the poor simple fellows who have got a lady on the brain; and if you had seen my Lord Marco at Ceruglio, when there was nothing to do —for whenever he had to do anything practical, or set his head to work, it was quite another thing; but if you had seen him then, you would have taken him for some blockhead who had left his senses at home. Suppose he was riding? it was to Ponte Petri, or towards San Marcello; then he would look sadly away towards Garfagnana and Lombardy, and evidently wished to be flying to the top of the Apennines, so as to be able to look down on his beloved lair beyond the Pô. In the evening he would walk alone for hours under the portico, or

stand at the window making love to the moon; fancy a soldier gazing at the moon! he must either be mad or in love; and this folly always going on! it was not as if he was a book-worm or a poet. Well, evidently the bird was limed—and then I could tell you besides——"

He would have gone on for ever, if the Italian, who was becoming very hot, had not cut him short, by saying: "I hear the clash of arms outside, it must be the standard-bearer, Virlimbacca, who got as drunk as an owl this evening;" and ran off to station himself in front of the entrance at the other end of the hall; the German from the Lucca garrison, returned to his post, and he of Ceruglio—having lost his audience—re-arranged himself in his corner, and resumed his interrupted slumbers.

We will wish him good-night, and return to Milan, to see how things are going on there.

All the villages of the district immediately subject to the dominion of the Visconti, or over which they preserved the suzerainty, were held, at the pleasure of their liege lords, by tenor of investiture, such as payments of money, labour, beasts, or men-at-arms. But these obligations were carried out, more or less, according to the state of the times, or the power and inclinations of the lord and subject respectively; so that nothing was more common than to see a baron, count, or abbot, shut himself up in his castle, and defy all comers; or for a borough or village to raise its draw-bridge, and receive, with cross-bow shots, the people who were sent to collect tithes, taxes, and duties of all kinds and descriptions.

Azzone, at the beginning of his reign, was so much disliked, and so feeble, that, do what he would, he never was able to scrape money enough together to pay the Emperor the sum promised upon his investiture; but no sooner had he made his peace with the Church than he at once got any sum he chose to ask for.

The priests, sent by the Pope, scoured the villages and the castles in the viceroyalty, offering indulgences to all who would come forward, either personally or with money contributions, to defend the city from the excom-

municated Bavarian; and in a moment, especially from the country, provisions, arms, money, and men poured into Milan; so that the place was soon thoroughly prepared to stand a siege.

Limonta, as the reader is aware, was a fief of the monastery of San Ambrogio. Now the Abbot, who was one of the Emperor's creatures, and owed him everything he possessed, did not care, you may be sure, to call out his own vassals against him; and, in fact, he had already issued a proclamation here, as in all the other lands belonging to the monastery, to this effect:

"That no one, under pain of felony and excommunication, should dare to favour in any way the party of Azzone, a rebel against his liege lord, as well as against the Supreme Pontiff Nicolas V., and an abettor of that schismatic, heretic, homicide and necromancer, that monster of wickedness and iniquity, Pietro Jacopo di Caorsa, who had the audacity to call himself Pope John XXII."

The people of Limonta were a little frightened at first at this braggadocio, but when they knew it was likely to bring the reverend prelate into disrepute with the authorities in Milan and the surrounding districts, they made great game of it. It was no slight relief for those poor people to be out of the clutches of a wretched little potentate, who had bullied them so long, and who had presented them with that charming fellow, Pelagrua. Besides, it was he who had sent those sixty lancers into the place on the errand we already know, and swore he would do the same ten times over, if necessary, to pull down the village and hang up all the Limontese. So when the priests, sent by the Pope, came into those parts to get the Limontese to take up arms against the Emperor, no one can describe the wild pranks with which they were welcomed by the mountaineers, who kissed their hands and garments and carried them about in triumph.

All the inhabitants now wished to remove themselves and their poor furniture into Milan, and it was not easy to turn them from this piece of folly, which would have

emptied the village, and, by pouring in a helpless crowd, have added considerably to the embarrassments of a city that was daily expecting a siege. A selection was therefore made of all who were capable of bearing arms, and our friend the priest was placed at their head. Among these was the boatman; whose aged wife, Marta, was quite content to remain at home alone, in order to allow her husband to go where duty called him. Nay, poor as she was, she insisted on his taking the greater part of her poor rags, to prevent his depending entirely on the bounty of others; thus offering something from her poverty in aid of the common need, to obtain the promised indulgence. But the priest pitied and admired her extremely, and allowed, nay even insisted on her accompanying her husband; nor did this favour, granted to her alone of all those who had requested it, provoke a word of discontent. All felt that the poor old creature's case was an exception to every rule, and that her misfortunes, as well as her virtue, had made her a peculiarly privileged person.

The little party started for Milan with the few effects they had been able to collect together, only leaving to those who remained behind the barest necessaries of life. On the way they fell in with other parties coming from the neighbouring villages, who were all travelling in the same direction, furnished with provisions and arms according to their ability.

On arriving at Milan they found the people engaged in making redoubts and ditches, building fortifications, and fabricating engines of war. The streets swarmed with artificers, men-at-arms, priests and friars of all denominations, brown, white, and black. On the squares and at the angles of the streets were placed the forges of the armourers, who were hard at work blowing the bellows, turning the red-hot iron with tongs in the fire, hammering it on the anvils, and plunging it all hot and hissing into water; while mingled with the clang of hammers, the rasping noise of files, and the shouts and songs of the artizans and spectators, was to be heard in all directions the noise of drums and trumpets, and of

the bells which never ceased pealing day or night from every church in the city.

The troop of Limontese, on their entrance into Milan, had displayed their white banner with a swan in the middle, with a crozier in its bill and a mitre at its feet—the arms of the monastery of San Ambrogio. The priest went in front and his people followed him in pairs, dressed in various ways. Some in large coats; some in their doublets, with gaberdines and cloaks made of wool, or of bear or sheep-skin, with caps and hoods of every shape; armed with hedging-bills, partisans, daggers, and bows, with shields of polished oak behind their shoulders, and large bone-handled knives stuck in the pocket hidden under the right side of their breeches, called in the vernacular Latin of the period, *coltellum de garono*, or "cuisse knives."

The citizens received these new arrivals with great demonstrations of welcome and fraternity. The Limontese were at once recognized by their banner, and they were conducted to Count del Balzo's house, where they were to be lodged.

The house of Count del Balzo being situated close to the postern gate of Algiso, now Ponte Beatrice, was chosen for the quarter of the troops who were to defend that postern, the terrace beneath, and the moat which reached as far as "Il Pontaccio," in those days called "La Porta Comacina."

The Limontese, on entering the first court, found it, as also the verandah round it, full of arms, provisions, and people. They took possession of a hall on the ground-floor, and while they were seating themselves on some benches round a table, and were preparing, to use a modern expression, to make themselves comfortable, there came in a groom to summon the priest into the Count's presence.

This good man first saluted his noble host, and then, at his request, told him the names of all his people whom he had brought.

"Since I have been brought by my bad luck into such a scrape," said the Count, "it is a great comfort to

find at least a few people whom I know well round me, and to have some good faithful vassals at hand to take my part, because, you see, here am I in the power of these wretches, who lured me into this trap, worse luck. On the other hand, if by chance the Emperor should after all gain the upper hand, what would become of me if it were to come to his ears that I had received all these people under my roof? And as if it was my fault that they came! Did I send for them? What good will they do me? Ah, *messere*, if we were only back among our mountains!" and he heaved a deep sigh.

The priest without differing from him openly, sought to reassure him and to give him courage, assuring him the Emperor would be repulsed, and that great preparations were being made for the defence; but the Count only got impatient.

"And what do you know about it?" he answered, brusquely; "You know nothing. Now, what I want you to do is to impress upon the Limonta people that they must never forsake me, for I may fairly call myself a Limontese. By-the-bye, I want you to find out for me among the people from the monastery of San Ambrogio, those soldiers who set fire to the district, for I don't want any quarrels between them and our people. If only Lupo was here—soldiers understand one another so soon; he might keep the peace. The mischief is I don't know where he is now."

"Lupo?" said the vicar; "we saw him just outside the gates, in a little square, teaching a company of peasants the sword exercise. He came with us as far as your door, but would not enter; for he said you had forbidden him to do so."

"It is true," answered the Count, greatly embarrassed; "there was a certain story; but now, if he would come, for the reason I tell you, I would gladly give him leave."

"In that case," replied the priest, "you can send for him at once. They will find him in that square on the right hand going out of the postern, close by a big church, quite new, with a red façade."

"The Church of San Marco," said the Count. "Yes, I'll manage it."

So he sent off at once, and soon after Lupo appeared, quite enchanted to be again in the good graces of his former master, and to be in the company of his dear parents and country folk. When he heard what was required of him:

"It all depends," he said, "on whether our mountaineers are willing to be reconciled after all they have suffered; as to the soldiers, I can answer for them."

The priest went down immediately into the lower hall to prepare the minds of his flock for the wished-for reconciliation: and he was still speaking to them, when Lupo entered, holding Vinciguerra by the arm, and behind them came all the other soldiers who would have so cruelly ill-used the Limontese, had not Lupo arrived so opportunely to their rescue.

The soldiers were the first to cry out, "Viva Milano!" "Viva Limonta!" and the mountaineers, half persuaded by the priest's admonitions, half touched by this cry, and by those rough soldierly faces, which were expressing at that moment nothing but honesty and good-will, rose and went to meet them, and the persecutors and persecuted embracing each other, forgot all the sufferings they had endured and the revenge they had taken, in a mutual reconciliation.

The boatman was the only person present who remained seated, with his arms tightly folded on his chest, and an expression of face that showed no emotion, but only a surly and dogged determination.

Vinciguerra recognized him as the peasant who had conducted Bellebuono to the ambush, and tapping him familiarly on his shoulder, said:

"What! my good fellow, are you here, too?"

Michael, without altering his position, or answering a word, looked at him with eyes as savage as those of a mastiff catching sight of a wolf.

"Ah, you rogue!" continued the soldier, half laughing, "you took us all in with that nonsense about the florins which Bellebuono had gone to get, and which we

were all to share in. Don't you remember? You did not think then that we should meet here. Mountains stand fast, but men move about. We shall know each other another time."

"And I am here," answered Michael, raising his head; "I am here to give you satisfaction, and to all the rest of you."

"Oh!" cried the soldier, bursting out laughing, "so the crabs want to bite the whales. Now, look here, my master, the past is dead and buried; what has been, has been; come here, and let us have a drink together. Why do you look at me in that savage way?"

"Come, we are all friends here," interposed Lupo. "So, come Michael, greet and make friends with this honest soldier."

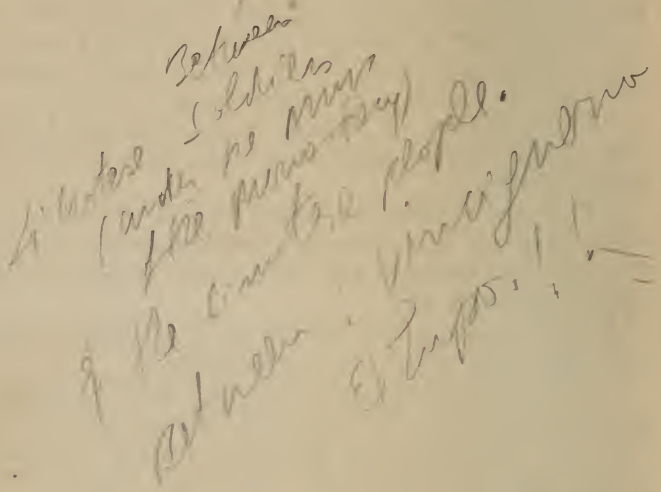
"You know what the priest said to you," the good wife whispered into the ear of the obstinate boatman. "Is this the example you give to the others, you who are the oldest of all?"

Michael rose up, and obeyed as if yielding to force, and then went back to sit down as before.

"What an ill-conditioned fellow!" said Vinciguerra to Lupo, going off with him, and walking up and down the hall, "As if it were his part to forgive! I should have thought it had been the other way! And if it had not been for my regard for you I would soon have taught him better manners."

Lupo told Vinciguerra of this man's great sorrow in having lost his only son in a shipwreck, and how, ever since, he had seemed stupefied by his grief. At the same time the priest, going up to Michael, gave him an account of all that Vinciguerra had done for Lupo at the time the latter was at Chiaravalle in his charge, under sentence of death. These pieces of information, acting on their naturally good-natured dispositions, inclined them soon to kinder feelings, so that at last the boatman and the soldier, coming on each other directly afterwards in the middle of the hall, threw their arms, without saying a word, round each other's necks; and ever after a cordial fellow-feeling existed between them.

The Count del Balzo now sent for some bottles of good white wine, and the new peace was sealed by a mutual interchange of healths between the parties. The wine was from Limonta; and the praises which it drew from the lances of the monastery, would have succeeded in smoothing away all asperity from the hearts of the mountaineers, if any had still remained.



CHAPTER XXI.

THE Count arranged that the priest of Limonta should have a private room set apart for him, and that he should be a guest at his own table; and he also received into his own family the boatman's wife, our old friend Marta, who was lodged in the part of the house occupied by Ambrose, where she looked after the household affairs in company with four or five other women, hired on purpose for this extra work of arranging the beds, doing the washing, and cooking, and scouring the kitchen utensils for such a number of people.

The poor woman, in the midst of all her occupations, had her thoughts constantly turned to her mountains; she never lost sight of the picture in her mind of the vast, soft expanse of the lake, the silver streak winding amid the rocks of the streamlet, which she was wont to look at from her window. Each morning as she woke she fancied herself again in her hut, and that she had around her the beloved brown walls, the table in the centre, those oars piled on the floor, those seats, that little bed—and together with these sweet and sad memories, another always arose, still sadder, still dearer than all—almost unspeakably sad to a mother's heart, but there was no longer the sharp pang of the earlier days; time and humble trust in God had proved a healing balm to her wound. The poor creature was also now near her Michael, from whom she had secretly feared that she should be separated, and she was able to pay her usual attentions to him, and employ herself for him, as for her other country people, with the idea of contributing, as far as in her lay, to the defence of her own country and faith; all these circumstances com-

bined to calm her feelings more than anything had done since the day of her terrible sorrow. She found in her work, and even in her bodily fatigue, an unwonted consolation, and a placid melancholy that was not without its charm. She often prayed, and her prayers were calmer and more resigned; she wept, and her tears were not bitter as before, they flowed softly and abundantly, and seemed to take a weight off her heart, which gave her real relief.

The good old creature became very intimate with the falconer's family; Marianna, Ambrose, Lupo and Lauretta were all very fond of her, and looked upon her as a relation, and she, while pursuing her household labours, would often revert to her mountains and her lake.

It was with Bernardo alone that she could never get on: that tiresome fellow had never given up any of his obstinate predilections in favour of the Bavarian and the Antipope; he seldom left home for fear of the risk of breaking his head in defending opinions no longer generally held, but in the bosom of his family he never ceased from grumbling, quarrelling, and tormenting one after another; and this Limontese guest was not spared more than any of the others in his scholarly wrath and his schismatic fancies.

In the meantime, news arrived that the Bavarian's army was advancing. There were two, three, or four thousand troopers, and an infinite number of foot soldiers. Cane della Scala contributed four hundred knights; many Ghibelline nobles from various Lombard cities, and many from among the most powerful families in Milan itself, had raised the imperial standard, and hastened with their vassals to the Emperor's assistance. His forces were enormous; the preparations for the siege terrible.

It was at this time that Pelagrua arrived from Lucca, and, having conferred privately with Lodrisio, hurried off to fortify and victual the castle of Rosate. Soon after, another courier arrived with letters for the Viceroy, and spread the news that Marco was master of

Lucca and the surrounding territory. The joy this created in Milan is easier to be imagined than described; they made up their minds that this singular event was the effect of a plot arranged long before with the Guelphs of Tuscany, so as to catch the deceitful Emperor in the act, and this opinion succeeded in greatly increasing the confidence and courage of the Milanese.

A day passed, another and another, and then there arrived from Monza news that the Bavarian had arrived before that city, and that her gates were shut in his face. They heard, too, how day and night the sentinels and patrols were exercised, scouts were sent out, and companies of soldiers were posted in different places, and day and night they worked with furious speed to complete the engines and the fortifications. "They are coming to-day—they will come to-morrow," was the cry; but it was not till the twenty-first of May that the imperial standard came in sight, followed by an extraordinary number of men and horses, and a marvellous train of equipages and baggage.

At that time the town of Milan was surrounded by a moat which had been excavated more than a century and a-half before, in order to fortify the city against Frederick Barbarossa, the same moat which, long after the epoch of our story, became navigable, whence it derived the name of *Naviglio*. Bridges have now taken the place of the principal gates and posterns of the city in 1329.

The Emperor at first pitched his camp on the bridge of Archetto, and then advanced towards ths postern of San Ambrogio, and he and his court took up their residence in the monastery of San Vittore, which was outside the city walls, and just opposite the said postern. The besieged Milanese could see the lights of that vast building shining through the night, and hear the noise of the banquets which the Bavarian held there; and they endeavoured to hurl some rocky stones by means of a petard, which they had placed on the top of the tower still to be seen by the side of the bridge of San Ambrogio, shouting as they propelled them, these strange words

preserved by Fiamma, "O glabrione ebrioso, bibe, bibi, ho, ho babii, babo."[1]

The principal efforts of the emperor in the siege were directed against the suburb of Porta Ticinese, in the hopes, that by making himself master of the hills at that place, the city would be starved into a surrender; but that portion, by the advice of Marco, had been fortified more strongly than any other; many feats of arms were performed there, and our people, instead of being dislodged, had always the advantage over their assailants.

The siege had lasted more than a month, when Lupo was informed by some of the leaders, that at the postern gate of Algiso, that very night, some provisions of which the city began to stand in need, were to be expected; and he was charged to let down the drawbridge as soon as he heard the signal agreed upon. Lupo had been appointed captain of the Limonta troop, and placed in charge of this postern, since the lances of the monastery of San Ambrogio had been removed from thence, and stationed in a tower close to the suburb of Porta Ticinese, where there was most need of disciplined and experienced troops.

The night came; our mountaineers were scattered along the ramparts looking towards Porta Comacina, with Lupo on the top of the tower beside the postern, looking out. After waiting a long time he saw a light appear at last on the steeple of the Convent of San Simpliciano: this was the pre-arranged signal, to which he hastened to respond by opening a dark lantern, and placing it for an instant between two battlements on the tower. Having done this he went down to a lower floor where his father Ambrose slept, together with Michael the boatman, and four other Limontese, and said to them: "Get up immediately, so as to be in time." They rose immediately, and running to the loopholes, listened hard; all was silent on that side, and they only heard the steps of two sentinels who watched at the foot

[1] Freely rendered:—"Drink, bearded ruffian, drink."

of the tower. But in a short time their ears caught a dull sound approaching, the rumbling of wheels, the trampling of horses.

"Listen!" said Lupo; "I do believe it is a waggon."

"It is undoubtedly a waggon," returned Ambrose.

"What blockheads those peasants must be!" continued Lupo. "What need was there to come with a waggon, and make so much noise? Could they not bring the things on their shoulders,—or at the worst employ mules?"

The night was dark, so that you could not see twenty steps before you—a man now advanced to the edge of the trench, clapped his hand three times, and said:—"San Ambrogio."

"For whom?" inquired Lupo.

"For Luchino and for the Fatherland," replied the other.

"That is the watchword," said the falconer's son, in a low voice, and then raising it a little:

"Why do you come with a waggon, and run the risk of being caught by the German patrols?"

"It is provender for the Count's stables," answered the man from below.

The drawbridge was now lowered, and four horses drawing a waggon of hay came on under the arch, till the leaders almost touched the closed portcullis with their heads; at a word from the Limontese captain the portcullis rose, and lifting itself noisily between the fluting of the pillars, was nearly hidden in the vault above; then the man who had charge of the waggon urged on the horses for a few steps, and then stopped short with some trivial excuse. "Go on!" shouted Lupo to him; but instead of obeying he uttered a shrill whistle, and a band of soldiers, issuing from behind the church of San Marco, where they had been hiding, galloped towards the arch.

"Let the gate down!" cried Lupo. They raised the weights, and the portcullis fell, but in falling it came against the waggon of hay underneath, and remained suspended in the air. "Raise the bridge!"

"We can't raise it, for those outside are holding it with ropes and pulleys."

"Treason! treason! Ambrose! Michael! Limontese to the rescue! Treason!"

The keeper of the tower blew a sharp blast on his horn to summon help; those scattered along the fortifications ran up from all sides: the two sentinels, the falconer, the boatman, four or five others, rushed on either side of the waggon, and laying wildly about them, succeeded in keeping back some men on foot who were forcing an entrance. At the same time Lupo sprang on the backs of the horses fastened to the waggon, showered blows upon them with the butt-end of a lance, pricked them with the point, and urged and frightened them with his voice; so that at last, by arching their backbones, and straining every nerve, with their bellies bent to the ground, they succeeded in moving their load a little, notwithstanding the resistance that was opposed by the enormous bars of iron sunk in the hay which had yielded to the weight. The falconer's son shouted out two or three times for the gate to be raised for a moment, so as to set the waggon free to pass below; but in the midst of the confusion and uproar his voice was not heard. In the meantime the German cavalry horses had become furious, the bridge re-echoed with their iron hoofs, and some of them had already penetrated under the arch, where it was perfectly dark, and where the confusion, and noise, and the exchange of blows was quite frightful, till in the midst of the clamour was heard the sound of descending iron, and then arose a sharp cry of agony. A last effort had at that moment freed the waggon from the weight which embarrassed it, and the portcullis in its descent had fallen on a German trooper who was just underneath.

Soon some lighted torches arrived to illumine the scene of terror. Five or six German horsemen, who had already made their way through, were quickly despatched by the Limontese, and below the arch of the bridge there began a furious fight between those outside, who were trying with levers to raise the portcullis, and those

within, who were using every effort to prevent them. They dealt savage blows right and left with their pikes and lances, to the destruction alike of men and horses; but the Germans had the worst of it, embarrassed as they were by the formidable defences with which the gate on their side was armed; sharp spikes, on which, in their headlong career, they were impaled.

Lupo now perceived a fresh troop of enemies advancing on the road of San Marco to renew the fray, so he ordered some of his people, who were arriving from all sides, to mount on the tower and level a mangonel at them. In a few minutes a storm of stones descended from above, and from the loopholes a cloud of arrows, and the Germans found they had better abandon the enterprise, and take to flight.

The drawbridge having been raised without further hindrance, and all being now quiet, the Limontese returned to let the portcullis completely down, and found beneath it a fine Hungarian horse, that had been caught, together with its rider. The horse, which had received that enormous weight on its spine, had both its hind legs broken; the soldier was held by the foot, and both were struggling violently to get from under the terrific weight. The poor animal, whose hinder parts were crushed to the earth, with pricked-up ears and mane erect, its eyes bloodshot and starting from its head, and its nostrils distended, raised its head from time to time, kept pawing and striking fiercely with its fore feet, trying to rise, and biting the while at all who approached it, and uttering shrieks of pain. The rider, with one foot broken and entangled between the broken limbs of the horse and the portcullis, was frightfully shaken and jolted at every movement of the animal. He twisted himself about and clutched at everything with his hands, now raising himself on his knee, and with clasped hands, praying in his German tongue that they would spare his life; now picking up his sword and brandishing it fiercely, and hampered and wounded as he was, showing that he would not allow himself to be killed with impunity. Seen in this attitude by torchlight, with a face

all covered with shaggy red hair, with his grey eyes flashing with rage, pain, and fear; he seemed like a wolf caught in a trap at the moment when the shepherd is coming behind him with upraised club to give him the *coup de grace.*

Our mountaineers took pity on him, and removing him from under the trap, carried him to a house, where he was looked after by old Marta, who was a great hand at setting broken bones, and was considered the first doctoress in Limonta. The poor woman, in the innocence of her heart, did not think she sinned against the love of her neighbour by showing it to an enemy, who, now that he could do no further harm, she thought had a just claim on her sympathy.

That same night, a little more than an hour after the abortive attempt made by the Germans, Pelagrua, wrapped up in a grey cloak, with a hood over his eyes, and fully armed under his mantle, appeared at the house of Lodrisio Visconti, whose door he found half closed. He went in, and recognized by some soldiers who were standing on guard there, passed on into a room where the master of the house came to meet him, with an anxious and expectant expression of countenance.

"Are you alone? and at this late hour?" said Lodrisio. "What has happened?"

"Death and confusion to all those meddling hill-folk!" replied Pelagrua, throwing off his cloak.

"What! Has the stratagem failed?"

"Everything is as bad as it can be."

"Oh, you cowardly traitor!" cried the knight, going up to him, clenching his fist in his face. "I don't know what restrains me from leaving the marks of my hands on that ugly visage of yours."

"Listen!" said Pelagrua, without seeming to be greatly alarmed at this explosion. "It has not failed through me; it was all owing to that gallows-bird of a Lupo, that squire of Ottorino's; you know whom I mean. He did not give me time to unfasten the horses, and I had some difficulty in escaping from their claws, and in coming here to tell you about it."

"And you may have been recognized?"

"No; for I had my hood over my eyes, and then there was no one to see us."

"And the Germans?"

"Were all driven back."

"By a handful of peasants taken unawares? How is it possible?"

Here the seneschal of Rosate began to describe exactly and minutely the whole affair as it had happened.

Lodrisio, on hearing of the brave defence made by the Limontese, felt the sort of rage which a bird-catcher feels towards the birds which escape from the snare, and are so rebellious that they will not allow themselves to be killed to please him.

"The rascals!" he exclaimed; "the knaves! But it is I who am a fool, for having trusted such an affair to a coward like you; and I must pay for it. Still, at any rate, you have lost your chance of fortune. If I had become master of Milan, you would not have had cause to repent it, and you would have been better off in my service than you ever will be as Marco's slave."

"As for that matter, I might have run the chance of breaking my neck on my own account. But what does it signify? I knew well enough that it was a case of 'nothing venture, nothing have,'" answered the ruffian, coolly, "and therefore I spared no trouble, and nothing was left undone by me, as I told you. Can't you fancy, that among other incentives, I should have had great satisfaction in chastising soundly those rascally mountaineers who played me that ill-turn at Limonta, and on whose account I was obliged to beat a retreat from a place where I lived in as much ease and comfort as a prince?"

Lodrisio struck his brow with one hand, and again repeated:

"To make such a dead failure as this—to be stopped in full career by such a small obstacle!"

"There is one comfort," continued Pelagrua, "which is, that no one suspects us. The affair was conducted so cunningly, by such secret means, that—I don't say

this because I had a hand in it—but I defy the devil himself to find the key to the mystery. I have run the risk all myself, and you——"

"That remains to be seen, wretched dolt!" cried Lodrisio, interrupting him. "I have for my part to repair the mischief done, and I certainly shall not return thanks because, in falling, I have only broken my legs, when I might have also broken my neck. Now, get out of my sight! To-morrow evening you had better go off to your castle of Rosate, which I wish to goodness you had never left! In the meantime you must watch and listen to find out what is generally thought of this night's work. Before going away you must inform me of this. Be off with you! I have tried you, and you have failed me at a pinch. I have only one more charge to give you—take care not a word escapes you of what has passed between us, or it would have been better for you if your tongue had dropped out."

"As to that," replied Pelagrua, "have no fear; you can make yourself as easy as if you had been talking with that wall there. I have not been to see you, of course!"

When the seneschal of Rosate had departed, Lodrisio remained alone to digest the rage which this contretemps had excited in him. He had known Pelagrua at Rosate a short time before Marco had set off for Ceruglio. It is well said, "birds of a feather flock together," and they had no sooner met than they came to a mutual understanding, and while preserving their respective positions of master and servant, they at once became entirely united, and agreed to support in every way the machinations of Marco, resting as they did their hopes of personal aggrandizement in the success of his projects. But when the seneschal brought from Tuscany the news that Marco had been elected lord of Lucca, the plotters were quite disconcerted, feeling sure, that occupied with these new interests, and content with his position, he would not wish to commit himself any further to a cause which had for some time seemed to be in a bad way, and therefore they thought of providing for them-

selves, taking the first opportunity that might offer. This was not long delayed. The Bavarian, in despair of obtaining Milan by force of arms, now tried to gain possession of it by stratagem, and after he had vainly endeavoured to bribe several leading men with large promises of money, titles, and dignities, he turned his attention to Lodrisio, who was well known as a turbulent and ambitious spirit, and as having more than once broken faith with the Torriani and the Visconti, and promised him nothing less than the lordship of the city if he was able to deliver it into his hands. The perfidious man took the bait at once, and confided the affair to Pelagrua, who having come from Rosate, arranged the whole intrigue which met with the discomfiture we have related above.

Now Lodrisio was thinking sadly over the superb castle in the air he had seen fall to pieces before him, and of the evil condition to which he was reduced.

As this attempt had failed, there no longer remained any chance for the Emperor; his German troops, discouraged and harassed by the frequent sallies from the town, could hardly be kept together; the Italians (as the confederates called themselves), destitute alike of pay and provisions, betrayed, and ill-used, were abandoning the camp in small bodies; and it could easily be seen that the Bavarian would soon be forced to raise the siege, and return home by the shortest road. He could not hope to impart his schemes to Azzone, who he knew had always suspected him, even when he was receiving from him every day the most complimentary treatment. Where was he to turn—to what rock could he cling amid this shipwreck of all his hopes?

When Pelagrua, together with the news of the principality of Lucca having been bestowed on his master, had brought to Lodrisio the other no less wonderful intelligence of Marco's love for the daughter of Count del Balzo, Lodrisio had immediately perceived that this love might be used as a means to keep Visconti's interest in affairs at Milan still alive. At first the intrigues with the Emperor, which were to have raised him to a gran-

deur to which his proudest dreams had never soared before, had put that thought out of his head, in the same way as when a window is thrown open, the full light of day puts out the poor ray of a lamp burning in the room; but in like manner, if the window is again darkened, the despised lamp becomes useful and brilliant again, so, when other projects are dissipated in the ambitious mind, a former and more distant hope is often revived and rekindled with fresh light.

That a caprice for a woman (thus he qualified Marco's love for Beatrice) could have so great a power over his friend's heart as to lead him to imperil such a position as that which he now held, was not a thought which could enter for a moment into a mind like Lodrisio's. No, indeed; but that fancy, he said to himself, could be kept up, and excite in his heart the thought of another principality rather better worth having than that of Lucca, one that he had watched and sighed after for so long. How slight a weight will sometimes turn the scale! Now, this slight weight, he flattered himself, he had at his command, and was determined to place it in the scales in time to decide the balance.

CHAPTER XXII.

PELAGRUA reappeared on the evening of the next day, and confirmed Lodrisio in what he had already heard from many quarters, that nothing had transpired of his transactions with the Emperor, who was now striking his tents and making his way towards Germany. The perfidious traitor, being now tranquillized, softened a little towards his accomplice, and began asking him about Beatrice and Ottorino.

"Important things have occurred," replied the seneschal of Rosate, who could hardly believe he was again in favour. "I have seen the Count's groom, who, as you know, is quite at my beck and call, and he tells me that for some time great doings have been going on at home."

"What sort of doings?"

"Why, marriage doings."

"And do you mean to say the Count agrees? What has become of all his fears of Marco?"

"Agree! no, he has not agreed, for his fright has not yet gone off; but what does that signify, such a blockhead as he is? The girl is going mad from her suffering; the mother is her adviser, and it will not be long before——"

"Well, then, we must look alive," interrupted Lodrisio, "and put a stop to this marriage at any price; for, although Marco may have fallen a victim to a pair of bright eyes, as soon as he knows that the lady is not for him, and that there is no help for it, he will no doubt fly into one of his frenzies, as he has done before, but what of that? He is far away off now, and his mind and thoughts are fully taken up with his new state; he must make up his mind to give her up, and he will give her up."

"I firmly believe," replied the steward of Rosate, "that the girl is nearer his heart than you think, and it may well be that he, when he knows she is another's, will get quite mad and savage; but I know one thing, that he will begin by falling on me because I have not prevented the marriage. And, worse than that, I have heard a rumour that after the marriage the wedded pair are to set off nobody knows where, and then how shall we look, all of us, when the lady has disappeared before our eyes? Marco will either go raving mad and sacrifice us all to his blind fury, or he will plunge headlong into the affairs of Tuscany, as you suggest, so as to efface from his mind scenes and recollections which would then only serve to keep alive his misery and disappointment."

"Then we must use every exertion to stop the marriage," said Lodrisio.

"That's soon said," replied the other; "when he was dismissing me at Lucca, he dinned the same thing into my ears, but at the same time he would not hear of Ottorino being harmed in any way."

"As for him, we must wait for what will turn up, and in any case, you must act according to my orders."

"I am most willing, but, you see——"

"Come, let us have no buts; you must lay aside all scruples and whims; those who act with me must follow me blindly without ever questioning or turning back."

"Well, you won't find me drawing back. I only point out the doubts and difficulties before beginning an enterprise; but never after it has been once set on foot. You will soon see I am as good as my word. As yet you scarcely know me, and hitherto I have not been successful; but you will soon see that I am no vain boaster."

"Yes, I have already had a specimen of your talents in the last affair."

"But," said Pelagrua, "if the devil mixes himself up in a business, what can I do?"

And thus ended the colloquy between these two scoundrels.

It is now quite time for us to return to speak of Ermelinda and Beatrice, whom we have neglected for some time.

After that night when the maiden returned from the feast bearing Lupo's reprieve, her mother had learned from her frightened confidences the dreadful certainty that she was beloved by Visconti. It is difficult to describe Ermelinda's sensations on such a sudden and unexpected discovery. Terror and sorrow for her child, indignation against Marco; and yet we must add, though she did not venture to confess it, even to herself, there was a momentary kindling of the old flame which made her blood curdle, and there was an instant in which her Beatrice appeared to her less beloved, less precious than usual. This was an unexpected revelation to her of the most hidden secrets of her soul. She was ashamed, and almost afraid of herself; but she soon restrained and conquered those feelings which were at variance with her maternal instincts, and her affection for her beloved daughter overcame everything else.

Ermelinda knew too well how entirely Beatrice had lost her heart to Ottorino, so that even if Marco, which was scarcely credible, were to ask her to be his wife, it could not be expected that she would be willing to accept him. So, in order to protect her from any such peril, her mother thought it best to hasten on the marriage already arranged with the young knight. In this way she flattered herself she would extinguish all hope in Marco's heart, and place her daughter under the protection of a husband.

As soon as Visconti was safe in Tuscany, Ermelinda began to entreat her husband's consent to the match which, at one time, he had arranged himself; but the Count was furious at the very idea, without being willing to remember that he had encouraged his daughter's attachment for the young knight, when her mother had used every effort to divert her from such a feeling. But constant dropping will wear away a stone; partly influenced by his wife's persistence, partly by the continued sight of his beloved Beatrice's passionate feel-

ings; and partly by time, which naturally had extinguished much of the impression made on him by the words and looks of Marco, and more than all, the knowledge that this very Marco was far away, involved in a sea of affairs, at last made him more manageable. An additional shock to his determination was given by the news that Marco had become lord of Lucca; and now that he considered him quite settled in Tuscany, and unlikely to find himself able to turn his attention to Lombard affairs, he began to allow Ottorino to return to the house which had been closed against him for so long. But even now he was only admitted at dusk, and in secrecy, for Heaven forbid that curious people should find him out, and carry the news to the ears of the gallant individual at Lucca. Thus the news of Marco's elevation, which had spoilt all the plans of Lodrisio and his tool, the seneschal of Rosate, had amended those of the family of Balzo.

As to Ottorino, the misfortunes he had suffered on Beatrice's account had deeply wounded his inmost heart. If formerly the beloved image had mingled with all his dreams, now she alone entirely filled the void of his impassioned soul. We say, the void of his soul, because the youth, since the bitter treatment he had received from Marco, felt that everything was for ever at an end between him and his former leader, and his future life in consequence appeared very empty to him, as he had till now only employed it in pleasing Marco, from whom alone he looked for fame and repu tation. Persons and places which reminded him of lost joys had become distasteful to him. His future being wrecked, nothing remained to him but Beatrice, the only desire he retained was to make her his, and then together with her to leave his native land, and betake himself to Asia to fight the Saracens; the usual resolution at that time of those who, disgusted with their own country, hoped for nothing more while remaining there.

But how could he imagine that the damsel's parents would allow her to accompany him on so long and dan-

gerous a journey, in search of an uncertain and mysterious future? Strange to say, the apprehension they felt of Marco smoothed every difficulty. Ermelinda let herself be persuaded to this painful step by the anxiety of placing her daughter in safety from any effort which the love or the caprice of Visconti might, as time went on, make to win her, and also to prevent, at the same time, the risk that Ottorino, discovering at some future moment the true cause of the hatred his chieftain had conceived for him, might be impelled by jealousy to revenge himself on so powerful and formidable a rival.

As for the Count, he resigned himself to this hard sacrifice to save his skin, provided that he could assure Marco that he had not broken his word, and could make him believe that Ottorino had carried off his daughter, who had escaped with him.

Thus far had events travelled, when the dialogue before mentioned took place between Lodrisio and Pelagrua.

The wedding was fixed to take place when things had quieted down after the siege. The Count made a condition that it was to take place secretly; the married couple were to set off at once to Castelletto, a fort on the Ticino belonging to Ottorino, as has been said before; and there they would only delay during the time necessary to prepare for the journey to the Holy Land: Lauretta and Lupo were to accompany them, and were satisfied to share their fate.

Beatrice, who possessed fortitude and strength of mind, was not alarmed at the discomforts and risks which were to be met with on so long and severe a pilgrimage, nor at the uncertainty of her future position in such a strange and distant land: any difficulty and trouble seemed sweet to her in the company of her adored Ottorino, shared with him and borne for his sake. But, then, to leave her dear parents, her sweet, beloved mother especially; to go so far away for so long, and perhaps never to see her again! The poor child could not bear the anguish of such a cruel thought! She had never been so tender, so caressing,

as in these latter days; she recalled to her mind, with a deep sense of devotion all that her mother had done and suffered for her all these years, watching over her from her infancy to this time. She felt a sharp pang of remorse when she remembered the childish passions with which she used to grieve her, emboldened by the blind indulgence of her father, and the last days spent at Limonta, when Ottorino was there, when she, owing to her new affection, had become irritable and impatient of maternal advice, and had grieved her poor mother with her strange wayward fancies.

Quite overcome with such bitter memories, the loving girl threw herself on her mother's neck, and deluging her with tears, implored her to forgive her. Often feeling almost repentant for her worship for Ottorino, which seemed, as it were, to have been robbed from her mother, she felt a longing to speak to her of her affection for her, and could not bear to be away from her, and was never tired of caressing her, or of saying a thousand tender words.

But the moment expected with so much trepidation, with an indefinable pang of terror, and yet of longing, was approaching nearer and nearer. The Emperor, in despair of doing any good by prolonging the siege, had already come to some agreement with Azzone, and struck his camp. By degrees the country troops, who had come to defend the city in its danger, were now leaving Milan to return to their homes. The Limontese were also preparing to go back to their mountains, happy and proud of the glory they had acquired from the nocturnal assault, and their number only diminished by four men, who had fallen under the German axes.

The lances of the monastery of San Ambrogio, who, by the Viceroy's arrangement, were to remain in Milan, came to wish our friends God speed. Lupo asked for Vinciguerra, whom he did not see with the others, and heard that he had fallen in a sally from the suburb of Porta Ticinese; some of his comrades, from the top of a tower, had seen him struck from his horse, and defending himself on foot like a lion, whirling around him his

iron mace. He was lost for a moment among the crowd of enemies who were pressing on him on every side; they thought he was taken prisoner, but soon after recognized his bleeding skull pierced by a lance. "He died like a brave soldier doing his duty," said Lupo; "may God give him rest:" and then they turned to more cheerful subjects.

The same morning that these good mountaineers were to begin their journey, their priest was summoned in great secrecy to bless the nuptials of Ottorino and Beatrice. Although Azzone was reconciled to the church, the interdict was still in effect, and was not raised till some months later; there was therefore an honourable and apparent reason why the marriage should take place in this way by stealth, without the usual solemnities, and the splendour suitable to the rank of the parties.

Marta, the mother of the drowned man, came that morning with her bundle under her arm to take leave of the Count's family, from whom she had received such kind and affectionate hospitality.

Ermelinda had proposed that they should remain in the house, she and her husband, and he was rather inclined to it; but the good old woman, taking him aside, spoke to him in the following manner:

"Listen, Michael; the Lord will provide, as he has provided before, for the few days that he leaves to us here below. When our poor Arigozzo (may God have mercy on him) was a child still at my breast, you well remember that the years were harder and more calamitous even than now; yet did Providence ever fail us? Were we ever a burden on any one? Thanks to the Lord, my sight remains to me, and my fingers are as good as ever; I will spin all day, and all night, too, if that is not enough. We are common people, we are accustomed to self-denial, but the constraint and high ways of a master we should not know how to bear: we have used ourselves to go bare-foot among flintstones and brambles, but shoes would hurt our feet. And then, if the Count stays here, as it seems he means to do, do you wish to bury yourself the rest of your life among

these walls which take away one's breath? For my part I would not stay here if I was to be made a queen for it. Oh, for our mountains! for that lake which makes one's heart swell! those olives, those chestnuts, that lovely sky, as wide as the eye can reach! while here one must raise one's head to see four spans in front of one; and all this time I have never been able to learn on which side the sun rises and on which it sets. Our poor, dear old church will be opened again now, as they say the Pope is going to take off the interdict; are we never to see it again—with the new altar which we have all vowed to put up to Saint Genesio, when the country is blessed again? And suppose we never heard the bell ring *Ave Maria* every morning and every evening? Besides, do you count as nothing being with people who speak as we do, rather than here, where it is so difficult to understand their gibberish, and in return they jeer at us, as if it was they who were speaking correctly?"

At this point she stopped for a moment, and then went on, sighing:

"Poor fellow, I understand, indeed, what gives you a distaste for those scenes. And do you think they are the same to me as they once were? before our trouble, when our poor boy (Jesu Maria, save him)——But cheer up, don't let us weep again; the will of God be done. What was I going to say? Do you think that by remaining far away from our country, by not looking on those scenes, that you will be able to lose the thought of him? No, indeed; and even if you could, I am sure you would not wish it. Look here, Michael, we will stay there together, and think of him, and pray for him, as long as the Lord leaves us down below to repent of our sins; and when he calls us to Himself, at least we shall have the comfort of being buried with him."

The husband, at the end of her appeal, drying his eyes, said:

"You are right, Marta, you are right; but you are a strange woman! you always tell me I must resign myself, and offer everything to the Lord; you scold me

for lamenting, when you are all the while inciting me to do so with everything you say."

The end of it all was, that they, too, determined to go home with the rest of their fellow-villagers.

So, as we said before, the poor woman, with her bundle under her arm, came to take leave of the Count's family. She made a deep reverence to the master of the house, and kissed the hand of the mistress, who responded with the warmest demonstrations of affection, which were the more valued in those days when the distinctions of class were far more marked than at present. For it was an age when public opinion, usages, and laws, seemed utterly to forbid all intermingling between gentlemen and plebeians, as if they were really made of different clay.

The Countess had already privately intrusted to the priest a handful of silver coins, to enable him to supply whatever was required by poor Marta and her household, modestly leaving the distribution of it to his discretion, being well acquainted with the delicate and reserved feelings of his mountain flock, and particularly with the careful and self-contained character of the woman herself, who was quite content, not to say proud, of her honest poverty.

Last of all, Marta came up to Beatrice and offered also to kiss her hand, but she drawing it gently back, placed it instead on her shoulder, and said to her: "Adieu, good Martha; think often of me, whom you so often carried as a baby in your arms, and recommend me to the Lord. Adieu!" So saying, the girl turned aside as if to go away; when suddenly, as if overcome by her feelings, she turned to the old woman, and looking up with her great blue eyes full of tears, exclaimed: "To-morrow, when you see from afar our castle tower, greet it for me. How often seated on its summit at dusk, have I seen a tiny light gliding over the surface of the lake, and recognized the song of the fisherman, that sweet song that used to assuage the troubles of my heart during the last days I spent in my beloved home; I shall never hear it more! Never again shall I hear

the murmur of the waves rippling against the shore—never shall I feel the well-known breath of the morning and evening breeze, nor the roar of the coming storm. Oh! greet for me our dear land, our mountains, and our glorious sky. And when outside the church door you assemble to raise the evening hymn to the Virgin, remember me who so often knelt, prayed, and sang with you all, and who when detained by some hindrance at the castle, have listened sadly and lovingly to that pious melody, wafted up on the gale, trembling and soft; then remember me! Few are the days God has allotted me on earth; and when you hear that my course is run, will you drop a tear to the memory of poor Beatrice, who, born and nurtured among you, hoped to lay her head, tired with the toils of life, in her own dear land, amid the tears and lamentations of those she loved."

The Count and Ermelinda, astonished, and even subdued by the prophetic spirit which seemed to speak from the mouth of their child, remained gazing on her without venturing to interrupt her; but when she, in her last words, revealed the strong presentiment she had of her early death, they could no longer restrain themselves, but both burst into tears.

The boatman's wife, to whom the girl's words had been addressed, half beside herself with astonishment and emotion, and yet pleased at hearing her beloved localities spoken of with those inspired accents of melancholy attachment, tried, amid her sobs, to take the maiden's hand. She obtained it at last, drew it towards her with gentle force, and impressed her lips on it.

They remained some moments in silence, Beatrice alone not weeping; the extremity of her emotion itself stopping the outburst of her grief. At last, when the excitement which had taken possession of her gave way, she felt herself softening, she pressed Marta's hand, which held hers, and said to her again:

"Farewell. Pray for me."

And as the old woman left her side, she ran into her mother's arms, hid her face in that tender bosom, and bathed it with burning tears.

CHAPTER XXIII.

AS soon as the trumpet gave the signal for the departure of the Limontese, Beatrice, restraining her tears, dried her eyes, composed her countenance, and then took up her position with her parents in a gallery looking towards the street. The banner of the swan was first seen to issue from the gate, followed by the priest and his flock, two and two, all on their way to the postern gate of Algiso; the boatman and his wife brought up the rear. Marta, raising her head to salute her benefactors, was agreeably surprised to see Beatrice quite recovered, and following with her eyes the little party as it moved off.

It was arranged that the married pair should start for Castelletto the next morning. We need not repeat the hurried advice, mingled with sobs and kisses, which the mother gave her daughter that last evening, and the promises mournfully exchanged between them, which, though thoroughly believed in at the time, were never to be realized. Who can fitly describe the words and tears with which the parents committed their loved one to the care of her husband; with what earnestness they commended her to Lupo and Lauretta, who were to accompany her to Palestine?

At last the fatal hour arrived, and after reiterated embraces, the girl resolutely tore herself finally from her mother's neck, and leaving her in floods of tears, flew down the staircase into the courtyard, mounted the palfrey prepared for her, and set off on her journey. Ottorino, Lupo, Lauretta, and two of the Count's grooms, who were to escort the bridal party as far as Castelletto, mounted their steeds quickly, and followed her. She found the falconer and his wife under the portico, who

were waiting to bid her and their two children farewell; but at that moment she was so alarmed at the idea of having to encounter another outburst of feeling, that she was eager to hasten her departure from those walls and those friends, whom it cost her so much to abandon, so she galloped past them as if she was flying for her life, without attempting to respond to their adieus.

Our travellers proceeded for some time in silence along the road leading to Sesto Calende. At last Ottorino laid his hand on the neck of the gentle steed ridden by his bride, and without relaxing their speed, said to her:

"Do you remember, sweetheart, the hours we passed together on the rock of Morcate? You were seated between your father and me, and one of your hands was enclosed in mine. It was then that the first hope entered my heart that I might be able to win you one day. How many trials have come upon us since then; and now you are mine, mine for ever! Oh, the ineffable sweetness of these words! You are my only blessing! I swear to devote my whole life to you, in order somewhat to brighten a lot that you have had the courage to share with me!"

With these and other loving expressions, the young knight gave vent to the happiness that filled his soul. Beatrice, keeping her gentle eyes fixed on her husband's face, wearied out with what she had gone through, and with scarcely vigour enough to understand these affectionate expressions, was able to imbibe their general sense, just as a person half awake hears the sound of a sweet melody; and, in fact, the girl, as she afterwards owned herself, seemed altogether in a dream.

They went on as far as Gallarate, where they dismounted at an inn, intending to rest there for some hours, when lo and behold! a courier arrived, and inquiring for Ottorino, handed him a letter. The youth opened it, and was nearly beside himself with surprise on seeing Marco's signature at the bottom. He spoke of having arrived in great haste and secrecy from Lucca, and that he wished to see him at once at Castel Seprio on matters of importance, adding, that he felt he had

done him a serious injury, which he was anxious to repair.

Ottorino was much excited and overcome by the letter. This new incident appeared likely to disarrange every project for the future which he had made, and place him in an entirely different position. The plan of leaving his country, which he had so hastily adopted, seemed, at the time, his only resource in default of a better alternative; but there still lurked in his mind a secret desire, and a distant, confused hope of returning some day by favour of his old suzerain. The anger of the young man against Marco was like that of a lover, very ardent and vehement at the time, but easily yielding to any excuse or any act of courtesy. Not remembering to have displeased Marco in any other way than by rejecting the daughter of Rusconi, and considering that this was but a slight reason for such a display of implacable hatred, he partly imputed it to the evil influence of some slanderer, and he felt sure that a day would come when his eyes would be opened, when he would receive him again, and take him to his favour as before.

It must be remembered that Marco now came himself to seek him out, and offer an apology; that proud and haughty spirit, whom he had revered and loved to his own hurt, even when the offence was still fresh, and when the anger and shame at having sustained it, was not yet alleviated by the repentance of the offender.

"I must first go to Castelletto," so spoke Ottorino to the courier; "but tell whoever sent you, that I will be at Seprio before dark."

"Oh, pray come at once," was the reply; "the warder sent me off in such haste, and I have already lost so much time in searching for you."

"But how did you guess that I was here?" inquired the knight.

"I heard from a groom of Count del Balzo's that you had set off in this direction. I followed you immediately, and have not been able to catch you up before."

"And who gave you the letter?"

"The seneschal of Seprio, so lately as last evening.

He came there with a baron, and five or six couriers were at once sent off in different directions."

"Are you acquainted with that baron?"

"No, because I am a stranger in these parts; but he must be of great importance, to judge by the honour paid him. He is a tall man, in middle life, and very fine looking. His face——" and he described Marco to a hair.

Ottorino made up his mind that delay, besides being discourteous, would be inexcusable at that crisis, from the serious interests depending on despatch, and resolved on a rapid visit to Seprio, and then to return at once to proceed on his way with his wife.

Castel Seprio was only about half-an-hour's journey off; and the going and returning would not take longer than the halt they were to make at Gallarate. He therefore told the courier to wait for him, and ran gaily off to tell everything to Beatrice.

"Is it Marco?" said she, in alarm; "is it Marco who has sent for you? Oh, do not go, Ottorino! Let us escape from that man; take me to Castelletto."

"But he is changed, I tell you; you see that he wishes to excuse himself to me, and to make up for the harm he has done me."

"Oh, no! do not go! let us fly from him, I implore you! let us fly while we have time!"

"Attend to me, my darling," said Ottorino, taking her hand; "your terror and repugnance are too unreasonable. After all, what has ever passed between you and him but what was most kind and courteous? Was it not he who gave Lupo his life, at your entreaty and your father's?"

Beatrice, at being reminded of that terrible night, which was always before her, was seized with a shudder of terror, and putting her hand on her husband's shoulder, said:

"Ah, Ottorino, you do not know all."

"What do you mean?" he replied, in surprise. "So you, too, are aware of it. I thought—yes, it is too true, the knight who unhorsed me at the joust was Marco;

but do you also know that he gave me my life out of kindness? Do you know that he purposely employed a blunt weapon in the encounter?"

She, who in her first agitation was on the point of revealing the secret of Marco's love, saw that a less important meaning had been given to her words, and collecting her thoughts, she remembered the importance of the secret and the strong recommendations of her mother, never to let it transpire to Ottorino, so as not to risk his being placed in deadly opposition to that formidable personage, so she turned her head away, and was silent.

Then the youth began to speak so forcibly and feelingly of the noble character of Marco, of the generous dignity of his spirit, and showed such confidence in him, such desire to renew their friendship, to rush into his arms, and explained to her of what importance this reconciliation might be in their common destiny, that she, after much resistance and many words, at last partly from persuasion, and partly from love to him, agreed that he should go to Seprio.

"You will soon come back, will you not?" said Beatrice at last.

"In a couple of hours, at the latest, I shall be here again," replied Ottorino. "I only wish just to see him, and arrange matters. In the meantime you shall stay with Lauretta under the charge of Lupo and your father's two grooms."

"But are you going to take no one with you?"

"It is only a short ride, I tell you; the courier who brought the letter will be with me, and that will be more than sufficient escort, as the country is quiet." So saying, he threw his arms round his bride, gave and received a kiss, and was off.

The two hours spoken of passed away, and a third followed them, and Ottorino did not come. Beatrice remained gazing from the window, and every object she saw moving in the distance from the quarter whence she expected him, seemed to her to be the white plume of his helmet; every noise she heard she took for the hoofs

of his horse; at times she would pace up and down the room with her attendant, and then call Lupo to ask what he could not answer, then she would hurry to the balcony again, and then sit sadly in a corner waiting. Nothing but delay and hope deferred—another and another hour went by, and at last the fifth from the time of his departure, and still Ottorino came not.

Lauretta's brother at last said to his young mistress, "If you will give me leave, I will go to Castel Seprio, or send there one of your father's grooms."

"It would be better for you to go yourself," answered Beatrice, "and make him come without fail: by the time he will return it will be dark, and you will be an escort for him. See what trouble he has left me in! you must tell him—no, do not distress him because of me—I am sure that he could not have done otherwise—only tell him to come back with you, to come back in any case; beg him in my name not to disappoint me any more." Lupo went out, and she followed him to the door: "Remember," she repeated—"remember not to come away without him;" and as she looked after him from the window, she made him a sign to emphasize what she had already impressed on him by word of mouth.

Soon after this, evening came on: and still they waited; when at last they heard the noise of horses arriving. Beatrice ran to the balcony, crying out: "He is here!" and the effect of her sudden joy was, that she could hardly breathe. A troop of horsemen stopped before the inn, and she heard a sound of steps coming up the staircase.

"Is that Ottorino? Is it you?" she said, hastening to meet whoever was coming. But it was not he; by the light of a lamp she recognized one of her father's grooms, who was ushering in the same man who had brought the letter, and had afterwards departed with Ottorino; this person, after having made a low bow to Beatrice, told her that he had just come from Seprio, where he had left her husband safe and sound; that he had not sent any message to her before, as he had been

hoping every minute to rejoin her, as he had promised; that now seeing it would be impossible for him to hurry off before the next morning, he had despatched him with an escort of six men, to take her at once to Castelletto with her maid and the two grooms.

"And Lupo?" asked Beatrice.

"He keeps Lupo with him, as he came to join him, for he wishes to send him to-night on an errand for the lord of the castle."

"And what does he wish me to do?"

"Your husband begs you to be of good courage, for you will see him to-morrow morning at Castelletto without fail."

"And will Lupo also be at Castelletto in the morning?" asked Lauretta.

"Certainly," answered the courier.

"Now, if you please," said the Count's groom, "I will prepare the horses."

Beatrice agreed; and almost immediately everything was ready, and they set off. The mistress and maid, mounted on their palfreys, were placed between the two men with whom they had just been speaking; the rest of the party followed at a short distance.

The night was dark, the weather promised to be bad, and there was no living being to be seen around. When they were at some distance from the town, Beatrice, hearing among the men behind her a noise of quarrelling and blows, told the retainer of her father's, who was beside her, to go and settle the dispute that seemed to have arisen.

But he answered: "They are robbers who are attacking us"—and urging on his own horse to a gallop, he took the rein of his mistress's steed, and led it on, while the courier performed the same service to Lauretta's.

"But listen!" insisted Count Balzo's daughter—"only listen: it is Ricciardino's voice; oh, go and help him!" Ricciardino was the name of the other groom of her father's, who was behind with the armed men from Seprio.

"Never mind," returned the man, "there are seven

of them well armed; you need not be afraid for them;" and he continued to urge on the horses as if to take her farther from the dangerous place, and to place her in safety, saying that she was entrusted specially to him, and it was as much as his life was worth should any harm befall her.

Not long after this the noise ceased, and they journeyed on rather more quietly; Beatrice, wished, however, to learn the issue of the uproar; she desired to speak to Ricciardino, and to hear from him what had happened: the other groom, who kept with her, after some resistance, turned back to inquire; but soon galloped up again with much apparent alarm, to announce that all the escort had dispersed, and that the thieves were on their track, and so saying he guided the party aside by some cross-roads leading into a wood. They wandered about all night, up and down secluded paths, over heaths, and through thickets; and at the end of their wanderings could not be more than an hour's distance from where they had first started. The women, who had been thoroughly frightened by their first adventure, were still more so now, after being led to and fro, constantly moving about, without ever arriving anywhere; the guides, however, very humbly begged Beatrice to keep up her courage, and owned they had lost their way in the confusion, and had got entangled in the wood; they therefore hoped she would forgive them, and not blame them to her husband, as they had now recovered the road and would soon be at Castelletto.

Oh! if the poor creatures had known where they had strayed to, and into whose hands they had fallen! Instead of going to Castelletto, they were being conducted to Marco Visconti's castle of Rosate, into the very clutches of Pelagrua; the Count's groom, who was with Beatrice, was none other than the traitor who had sold himself some time ago to this very Pelagrua, and the courier was a bravo of Lodrisio's, as also were the six men who had come from Seprio. All the events of the previous day and that night had been pre-arranged by the two scoundrels, in order to carry off Beatrice from

her husband. Their object was to keep her at Marco's disposal—but they wished to do this without causing her too much alarm, and without her perceiving that she was in the power of others from the beginning, and they meant to prepare her gradually for her destiny.

They had given up their first idea of mastering, by main force, Ottorino and his two followers who had remained faithful to him, and after having considered several plans, they had settled upon the one we have seen put into effect, of separating the young man from his bride by the trick of a forged letter from Marco. As to Lupo, they had arranged to send him a false message from his master, later on in the night; but this was unnecessary, as we have seen, for he had fallen into the trap at Castel Seprio, as his chief had done before him; and thus the stratagem had been completed. There remained the other retainer of the Count's, who had nothing to do with this villainy, but what could one unsuspecting man do among so many? And it would be easy enough also to get rid of him.

For Pelagrua, the affair appeared at first rather too full of risk; to carry off a noble young lady and imprison her! But Lodrisio, to whom success was of the utmost importance, as well as his schemes of revenge against Ottorino, had managed to silence all his scruples, by proving to him, that in the present state of affairs, there was no other means of obtaining what his chief had expressly ordered; that necessity must excuse violent action, and the result would justify the means. "It is as if I had told you to snare a partridge, and you had shot it instead," he said, "do you think I should find fault with you?"

In the end they agreed together that they had better leave Marco for some time in the dark as to the abduction, and wait and see how things would turn out; but as the whole affair could not in the end be concealed from him, they must let him into the secret by degrees, and they must also make it their business to dispose their prisoner's mind in his favour, and all this was to be done with as little risk to themselves as possible.

CHAPTER XXIV.

BEATRICE and her attendant arrived at the Castle of Rosate at early dawn; they entered it in the full belief that they were at Castelletto, as they knew nothing of the localities of that spot. They crossed a wide court-yard surrounded by covered galleries, ascended some stairs, and passed through various corridors, till they finally reached a saloon which opened on a further suite of rooms, without meeting a living soul. The treacherous groom who had escorted them to this point, now left them, saying he must inform the seneschal of their arrival, that he might come and receive the mistress's orders.

The mistress and her maid, thus left to themselves, walked through the rooms, which they thought very splendid, provided as they were with every possible comfort. There were magnificent beds, couches, tables, and mirrors—vases with fragrant waters and essences—fine stuffs and ornaments; everything, in short, delicate and soft that could be required by a charming and treasured bride.

Beatrice, who thought she was in her own house, fatigued with her long ride, threw herself down in an arm-chair, and while her maid busied herself about her, taking off her soft fur robe and dressing her in one of a lighter texture, which was there ready for her, unfastening her boots, and slipping on her feet a pair of open silken slippers, arranging her hair, pouring water on her hands to restore her, they talked on in the following way:

"The dawn is breaking," said Beatrice, "and he must soon arrive now."

"Oh, hardly," replied Lauretta; "why, we are only just arrived ourselves."

"But you must remember all the time they made us lose on the road."

"That is true. Oh, my lady, as soon as your husband comes you must tell him about those wretches; how they did not know where they were taking us, and made us lose our way, and tormented us for four hours and more, and kept you on horseback all that time!"

"Four hours, is it possible? do you mean we have lost four hours?"

"Indeed we have, and more; from what my brother told me, we ought to have been only two hours coming from Gallarate, and you must remember how long we were riding, and going fast the whole time."

"Well, at any rate," replied Beatrice, "in four hours Ottorino must certainly be able to get away. Tell me, how far is it from here to Seprio?"

"I do not know at all—you know I am not acquainted with this part of the country."

"How cautious you are!" cried Ottorino's wife. "Do you think it can be eight miles? Do say something—does that seem to you too short a distance? Well, let us say ten, even twelve; I will say as much as I can—twelve, shall I say?"

"Yes, it must be nearly as much as that."

"Well, that is not much for a man on horseback! It is soon done; and he may arrive any moment, so I may expect him now; don't you expect him also directly? tell me, for pity's sake."

"He may of course come very soon, but—if he delays, you must not make too much of it; for, you know, when men are talking of their business, they cannot be so particular as to an hour or two, more or less."

"Now you are speaking so that I can understand you; and you don't think that because of one or two hours' delay I should begin to be alarmed? I know how many circumstances may occur, and, as I say, I shan't be frightened—but he may, notwithstanding, arrive directly, and therefore I expect him. I implored him to make haste! But listen, don't you hear a footstep? perhaps he has come without our hearing the noise of the horses passing the drawbridge?"

So saying, she sprang up to fly to the window, but Lauretta, who was nearer it, reached it before her. The window looked on a gallery with crossed arches divided by slender pillars; from thence she saw the new arrival, and recognized him before her mistress had had time to look: so, drawing back her head from the iron grating, she said: "No, no! it is not they; who do you think is coming? It is Pelagrua."

"Who? the late steward of the monastery; the one who was at Limonta?"

"The very same," replied the maiden, and continued, "How can he have found his way here? That man who has fled from the country and has never been heard of since. To tell you the truth, the sight of him does not please me at all; it's like a bad omen. Oh!—but why should I frighten you?"

"You should put aside such folly. I know very well why he is here, and I might have expected to find him if I had thought about him. I will tell you about it afterwards."

Beatrice remembered how when she was at Varenna with Ottorino, the day after the shipwreck, the youth, now her husband, at the request of the priest of Limonta, had undertaken to provide a refuge for the fugitive; and as she had never heard of him since, she imagined when she saw him there, that he had been given some office in the castle.

There was a knock at the door of the ante-room. Lauretta, in obedience to a sign from her mistress, cried out "Come in." The door was thrown open, and Pelagrua appeared. He took off his black velvet cap, and, holding it in his left hand, came forward, bowing low.

Pelagrua, whom we may now as well describe personally, was a man of fifty years of age, middle height, and a poor, slight form; his cheeks, of a deathly pallor, never changed their hue for any cause. A thick pair of grey eyebrows shaded piercing black eyes, which but little accorded with the affected humility of his physiognomy —savage eyes, with a cruel and malicious expression— diabolical eyes, which would have condemned the face of the holiest anchorite. As he entered, he fixed them with

affected humility on the ground, but from time to time he raised his head and looked around with the rapidity of lightning, as if to escape the glances of others, like a thief who fears to be taken in the act.

He approached Beatrice, and bending one knee, he bowed to her and said: "Deign, gracious lady, to accept the homage of one of your most humble vassals, the seneschal of Castelletto."

"And has the charge of this domain been entrusted to you?"

"Yes, my lady; so I hope to be able to satisfy the illustrious and gracious lady and sovereign of my noble master, to whom I owe faith and affection for my whole life, which itself I owe to his mercy."

"You may rise," said Beatrice.

Pelagrua obeyed, and she continued, "My lord and husband chooses his own retainers; I must always be satisfied with his choice." And then, dropping the ceremonious manner and tone in which these formulas of homage were made and received, the girl, assuming a more natural air, asked him: "Tell me, seneschal, do you think it will be much longer before he is here? You know he is gone to Seprio."

"I am aware of it, and I know also that those who escorted you here little deserved that honour; but do not give another thought to them, my lady, I shall know how to reward them."

"No, no," interrupted Beatrice, "I do not want them to be punished on my account; indeed, I forbid it; all that they did, they did from good motives to obey me and their master, and if they exceeded their instructions —enough, I wish no more to be said about it."

"Is it possible," interrupted Pelagrua with a gesture of surprise and anger, "that any one could have been so rash? I cannot believe it. I was only speaking of their unpardonable stupidity in having lost the road, but if any wretch—whoever he may be—he shall repent it."

"Oh, as to that," exclaimed Lauretta, "I assure you that Count Balzo's daughter—" but her words were cut short by a reproving glance from her mistress.

The false seneschal, pretending to be quite struck with horror, said to Beatrice, in a voice trembling with suppressed indignation, "Permit me, gracious lady, for the honour of the castle—it would be terrible for all, for me, if your noble husband ever heard of it—permit me to learn who was so bold—and I assure you——"

"I have already told you to say no more about it," said Ottorino's wife with a resolute and dignified air, and then, assuming a more affable tone, on seeing the rogue before her bend his head down in confused and mortified silence, "What I asked you," she added, "was whether you knew of any reason which may still possibly delay my husband's return?"

"If you only knew," answered Pelagrua, with a face of assumed melancholy, "how grieved I am that the first news that I bring you cannot be of an agreeable character!"

"What news have you?" asked Beatrice anxiously. "Have you heard anything fresh?"

"A courier from Seprio arrived here a few moments before you did," answered the scoundrel, "with the information that you must not expect him to-day."

"Not to-day! and what keeps him there so many hours? Did the courier see my husband before coming? did he speak to him? and what message did he send me? Go and fetch him directly! I want to speak to him; I must speak instantly to the courier. Do you understand?"

"If you will allow me I can tell you everything; because really the messenger—I can hardly bring him here,—he spoke with my lord before setting off—he left him in the castle, in company with Lupo and with one of your father's grooms, who arrived there last night. They are safe and sound, all three, for that assault of brigands was really nothing, and he begs you to be of good courage, and the moment that he can despatch some affairs that keep him there, he will fly to you."

"But when did he say he would return? at the latest this evening, surely?"

"Oh yes, I firmly believe he will be here this evening without fail."

"But did he not say so himself for certain? Go at once and fetch the courier for me. Go! go! I am not used so often to repeat an order to a vassal."

Pelagrua bowed low, cringing before her as if asking pardon, and went off, saying to himself, "Oh, the little proud thing! Be quiet, you little fool." His bitter and cruel thoughts were compressed into a glance, which the wretch, as he went out of the room, threw back on his prisoner. Have you never seen a fowler, who, while taking a sparrow out of the snare, fixes his eye for a moment on the frightened little bird, who turns to peck at that hand which, with a slight squeeze, could crush its little bones and pound it into a jelly? Such was the present state of the case.

As soon as the seneschal had left the room, Beatrice began to count up all the hours that must pass. They seemed to her an eternity—she knew not how to fill the void; she thought the evening of that day would never come—she lacked the strength to cross that dreary waste of time. She was like a traveller, who, after a long and disastrous journey, arrives weary and spent at the top of a lofty hill which he had considered the end of his pilgrimage; and, behold, another hill meets his disappointed gaze, beyond which is to be found the promised land.

Lauretta, who perceived her mistress's depression, now came near her, leant her crossed arms on the table, and bent her head towards her. She fixed her sympathizing gaze on Beatrice, and remaining a moment silent, she looked at her with respectful affection, and said, "Pray remember, one day will not last for ever. You have already gone through many others, this will also come to an end. Please God this blessed evening will come at last; I know it must appear very hard to you, but you must cheer up. It is not as if you were in want of anything. You have only to speak to have what you wish done; the seneschal said just now to me as he went out, that it was for you to command, and all here to obey."

Beatrice, whose mind was pre-occupied, instead of answering, only exclaimed, as if following out her own

thoughts, "Well, he has, at any rate, Lupo with him, and my father's groom."

"That is what I tell you," went on the waiting-maid, pursuing this new train of thought. "You are quite right, he is in good company and friendly quarters, and you should not be anxious, but have a little patience. The misfortune is, that you set your heart so much on either finding him here, or on his arriving directly. You must remember, that the time appears long to us who are waiting here without anything to do, but a busy man sometimes cannot get away. Now do be at peace till this evening, when I really believe he will come—but, of course, there's a chance against it."

"Oh, what a chatterbox you are," interrupted Beatrice, who could not bear to have her own secret doubts even hinted at. She was like one, who, though trembling privately at some danger, is furious against anyone who mentions it publicly. "The idea of saying he may not come this evening! You put me out of patience."

"Forgive me! I was wrong—it was not that I believed it, but that I thought there might be a chance——"

"There is no chance about it—it is mere folly to think of it. If he had the whole world on his shoulders, he would come all the same. He might, perhaps, go there again if he was obliged, but he would come and see me, if he had not even time to dismount from his horse. That is certain. Now we must hear what this courier says. The seneschal seems to find it very difficult to bring him—this delay even begins to annoy me. What can he be doing all this time?"

What is he doing? Oh, poor child, if you only knew! Pelagrua is spending the time in instructing a bravo of his to act Ottorino's courier, in order to deceive her more perfectly.

When the two rogues had arranged everything, they came up to act their parts.

The man who was to represent the courier, was an old rogue escaped from the galleys, whom Pelagrua had unearthed from a wretched hovel close to the castle, where he supported himself by begging. The wretched

man squinted, he had a large scar right across his temples, his hair and beard were red. As he entered the lady's presence he pretended to stumble, and came forward, reeling and staggering about.

Beatrice was frightened, and jumped up; but Pelagrua came near and said in a low voice to her, with his usual submissive air, pointing to his companion, "He is a good fellow really—it is a pity that he drinks too much. That is the reason I was afraid to bring him before you, but you see I have obeyed you. He arrived a little excited, and ever since then he has been drinking incessantly, so that he is quite stupefied. If, however, you wish to question him, I hope he will be able to answer."

"Ask him if he saw my husband before leaving," said Beatrice.

Pelagrua went up to the pretended drunkard, and striking him on the shoulder: "Attend to me, Mastino," he said to him. "My lady asks you if you saw the knight yourself, whose message you have brought from Castel Seprio?"

"The knight," replied the wretch, stammering and stuttering, "did I see the knight? Why, it was he who gave me that bottle I told you of. Ah, what wine it was! and this stuff is not bad either—only a little rough——"

The seneschal interrupted him by asking "What did he tell you before dismissing you?"

"He said nothing but 'Drink a bottle to my health,' and I have drunk it—and I have sent two other bottles to keep the first company, and all to his health, for he is a good knight, and is not one of your stingy ones, like some others I know of."

"Now, try and attend, Mastino; was there anyone else with him?"

"Did I not tell you I was there?"

"I ask if there was anyone besides?"

"Yes; there was one other."

"And who was that?"

"Why, of course, himself."

"Himself?"

"Yes, the knight, confound you; why shouldn't he be there?"

Pelagrua, shrugging his shoulders, turned to Beatrice, as if to say: "You see that nothing can be got out of him." But the poor child, who was so terribly anxious to know something about her husband, said to the seneschal: "Do try and make him answer about the return this evening."

"I will do my best," replied the traitor; and taking his comrade by the arm, he gave him a shove, and called out to him; "Are you going to keep us waiting for a week?" and then asked him: "Did that noble gentleman say he was coming here this evening?"

"What! do you say it is evening?" exclaimed the rascal, bursting into a coarse, ill-conditioned laugh. He then drew back a little, pointed with an unsteady finger at Pelagrua, and then trying ineffectually to stand firm on his legs, he cried out hoarsely, "He says it is evening when it is not yet vesper time. Get out, you fool! However, bring me something to drink, as my throat burns as if the devil were inside it."

"Hold your tongue, you buffoon, and tell me what I ask about to-night!"

"Yes, yes; he'll come to-night certainly."

Beatrice felt quite comforted, but only for a short time, for the seneschal came close to the wretch, and bawled into his ear:

"But did not you tell me he was coming to-morrow morning?"

"Yes, yes; to-morrow morning, certainly."

"Now, do collect your senses; is it to-night, or to-morrow morning?"

Hereupon the pretended drunkard began to sing a drunken catch, in a voice like a crow.

But Pelagrua, giving him a good cuff on the mouth, cried out: "Hold your tongue, you blackguard!"

The poor young lady, disgusted with this scene, motioned to the seneschal to take the wretch away.

"Send off a trusty man on horseback at once," she

said. "He must take this letter to Castel Seprio and bring back the answer—he must be here in three hours at latest, or he will be answerable to me." The seneschal replied, with a low reverence, that she should be obeyed, and left the room pulling the rascal after him, who allowed himself to be dragged like a sack, reeling from right to left, and crying out: "Where are you taking me? We are all drunk!" The door was at last shut, and the two wretches had even reached the staircase, but the poor woman still heard that ribald voice crying out: "We are all drunk here."

CHAPTER XXV.

"YOUR husband says that he will not be able to make his arrangements for your journey to the Holy Land till the end of the month; so, my child, I promise to come and see you, with your father, once more before then. We will take leave of each other at Castelletto. Now, God bless you—in a week at the latest, we shall meet again."

Such had been the last words which Ermelinda had uttered, when she tore herself weeping from Beatrice's arms on the day of their separation. When the appointed time came, the good mother mounted on horseback at her husband's side, and escorted by two retainers, they departed from Milan before dawn, and arrived by rapid stages at Castelletto.

Ambrose, the falconer, was one of the two attendants —he wished to see once again his children, Lauretta and Lupo, before they also went to the Holy Land.

On reaching a plain in front of the fort, our riders saw the towers, walls, and balconies decorated as for a wedding. Ottorino's banner was flying on the topmost pinnacles, whilst shields of various forms and colours, emblazoned with his arms and emblems, hung from the battlements; rich hangings stretched from turret to turret, while on the rampart were planted large branches, and even whole trees, beautifully festooned with green leaves and flowers; at intervals, there were erected fantastic arbours, with little pennons on the top. Yet the appearance of all that preparation showed, that the festivities for which it was intended had been over for some time, as the leaves on the shrubs, and the festoons on the trellises, were faded and drooping.

Count Balzo, after having stopped a moment to contemplate the scene, turned chuckling to his wife, and

said, "See, the wedding decorations have not been taken down."

As soon as the little party were descried from the castle, two servitors were sent to meet them, clad in short jackets embroidered with blue and white, each holding a silver wand; one of whom politely asked the falconer, who was a little in front, the names of the lord and lady who were about to honour the castle with their presence.

"They are Count and Countess del Balzo," he replied. On hearing this the questioner blew his horn, when a party of armed men issued from the gate, and drew up in two rows on either side of the drawbridge, to receive the new comers. Soon afterwards, a chime of bells was heard from one of the towers, which was, however, drowned in its turn by shouts of revelry from the interior of the castle. Our travellers, after passing through a long passage, found the courtyard looking like a fair. A crowd of men, women, and boys, in gala dresses, came to meet them with shouts of welcome, echoed by a quantity of jugglers with dancing dogs, and a band of musicians, playing on every kind of instrument in vogue at that period.

The falconer leapt to the ground and was coming to help his mistress to dismount, when a red-faced, pursy individual, came rushing through the people to meet them. This was the seneschal, who motioned to Ambrose to stand aside, and just got up in time to fulfil his duty of holding the lady's stirrup. There he stood, puffing and blowing, scarcely able to say a word, and in the meantime bowing and scraping incessantly, to show his anxiety to pay them every attention, and his relief that they were at last arrived.

"Welcome!" at last he exclaimed, having recovered his breath. "Welcome to the noble chatelaine from her faithful lieges!" But suddenly raising his head, and looking up into the face of the lady he was addressing, he seemed suddenly confused and dumbfounded, muttered something to himself, and then continued aloud, and with an interrogatory accent ·

"The lady mother of our noble lady and mistress, I presume?"

"Exactly so," replied Ermelinda.

And the seneschal, motioning to the spectators to draw back, and let the lord and lady pass, conducted them to a magnificently-furnished room on the ground-floor, where the new guests found a number of maids, pages, and lackeys, ready to attend to them.

While Ermelinda, having seated herself, was greeting, with her usual kind politeness, some damsels who came to meet her, the Count took a turn about the hall, with his hands behind his back, stopping from time to time to examine the pictures on the walls.

"Is not that a portrait of Pico?" he asked the seneschal, who was in close attendance on him.

"Yes; of Pico Visconti, father of my noble master," was the answer with another deep bow.

"And this one," went on the Count, "is Maffeo, is it not?"

Just then the fat man felt his coat pulled by a page, who said, "The lady is asking for you."

"Yes; that is Maffeo, my master's uncle," answered the seneschal, adding afterwards, "With your permission I must go and attend on your noble lady, who has sent for me;" and, so saying, he hurried up to Ermelinda, who asked him cheerfully, "And where are the bride and bridegroom? have you told them of Count Balzo's arrival?"

"The bride and bridegroom!" repeated the worthy man, not knowing what to make of the question.

"Yes; where are they?" said the Countess in such a natural manner that he could no longer doubt her meaning.

"But are they not still with you?"

"Oh, I understand now! they must have come to meet us," said Ermelinda, smiling; "and we missed them; they, no doubt, took another road. You had better send a messenger off at once to fetch them back."

The seneschal now became rather disturbed. "Do

you mean," he said, "that they have not been staying with you? they have never arrived here. My master ordered me to be ready to receive him a week ago, but he has never appeared here—and I thought he was all this time in your house at Milan."

"Count!" cried Ermelinda, springing up and rushing towards her husband; "imagine, they are not here!"

"Whom do you mean?"

"The children—Beatrice and Ottorino. He says he has not seen them!" and she pointed to the seneschal, who, alarmed at the sudden terror which overspread the lady's countenance, stood motionless, not knowing what to do or say.

"What is it you tell us, seneschal?" stammered the Count; "that they have not arrived yet?"

"Certainly not. I believed they were at Milan."

"And they did not come here Saturday in last week?"

"Alas! no; neither on Saturday nor any other day."

"And have you had no news of them—no courier?"

"Nothing, as I tell you."

"It is not possible! What can have happened? they must surely have sent some tidings of themselves. And, besides, they have so many preparations to make for their journey."

"Oh, I fear some evil has befallen them!" exclaimed Ermelinda; "some band of robbers may have attacked them!"

"Gracious lady," interrupted the seneschal, "pray believe me, the country is tranquil; a knight might travel through it night and day with his legs on his steed's neck." (This was a way they had at that time of expressing that there was no danger of enemies or marauders.)

"And then," broke in the Count, "they were not alone; besides the waiting maid, Ottorino had with him his squire and two armed men, whom I sent with him; so they were altogether four men and two women, and such a party cannot disappear in this way from off the face of the earth."

"But, then, where can they be?" insisted Ermelinda, anxiously.

"I have been proving to you," answered her husband, "that you must not at once think the worst. It does seem as if heaven only knows where they are. But, you see, six persons cannot vanish without leaving some trace behind."

"Is it possible they can have been lost in the Ticino?" said the poor lady.

"Oh no, it is not full at this season—and then it would have been known. What say you, seneschal?"

"Well," answered he in a drawling voice, shrugging his shoulders, and then seemed to have nothing more to say—but catching sight of the face of the Countess, he saw her quite frightened at his dubious answer, so added quickly, "oh, certainly! I think also, if anything serious had happened we should have heard."

In the meantime the crowd under the portico had increased, and were struggling with each other to procure good places at the windows, to behold the new comers.

Some said that the arrivals were the bride and bridegroom—others would have it that they were still on the road, while all were anxious to make sure of the fact with their own eyes. It was, however, impossible to ascertain the true state of the case, as a good many, who had only seen Ermelinda in a confused sort of way through the window panes, amid a crowd of people, insisted that she was not the bride's mother, but the bride herself; so that there arose a grand dispute *pro* and *con.*; some calling out, "Long live the Count and Countess del Balzo!" others, "Long live Ottorino! long live Beatrice! long live the bride and bridegroom!"

Ermelinda, vexed and disturbed by these festive shouts, so ill-timed, begged the seneschal to send everyone quietly away. He accordingly went out, and in a moment all the vassals dispersed, some through the corridors and inner courts, others through the gates, and no one was left in the courtyard except about ten or a dozen jesters. These, although they had been amply lodged and fed while waiting for the bridal

party, did not, however, seem willing to go away empty-handed, but waited to be dismissed with a present, as was the custom of that age. The seneschal sent to fetch the presents already prepared, and distributed them according to every one's deserts.

One alone among them refused to accept his largesse.

"Not that I want a smarter garment, nor that I am more eager for money than my noble comrades," said this individual; "I have no wish to give myself airs, but I will not leave this castle without having seen the master's face; and whatever I accept shall be from his hands."

"The master is not here," replied the seneschal, brusquely, "If you want it, take it;" and he brandished in front of his face a hood lined with fur, which was the present destined for him.

"What? Ottorino not here!" persisted the jester, determined not to give up his point. "Then tell me, who the lord was who arrived just now on horseback?"

"It was the Count del Balzo."

"Count del Balzo? Take me to him, for he is a friend of mine—tell him I am Tremacoldo, and that I have something to tell him."

While the seneschal was sending off the vassals, and distributing the presents to the jesters, the Count and Countess, left to themselves, confused and amazed as they were, spent their time in asking each other a hundred questions, though well knowing they could not be answered; and proposed various schemes, without resolving on any one in particular.

At last a bright idea struck Ermelinda. "Perhaps," she said, "among so many people, there may be some one who can enlighten us."

"You are right," replied the Count; "I will go at once, and order an inquiry to be made, before everybody has gone away." So he went out at once under the colonnade to speak to the seneschal, and found him there with Tremacoldo, who would not be shaken off. The jester, on seeing Count Balzo, at once ran to meet him; and taking off his cap, which made all the bells

ring, made him a low comic bow, and began to say, "I was just arguing with this rogue, who wished to send me off as if I was a cut-throat, but I came here expressly, because I heard that Ottorino——"

"What? do you know any news of him? Here, come inside," said the Count, eagerly, and taking Tremacoldo by the hand, he led him into the hall. On his entrance, he said to Ermelinda, "This man knows something of our children."

The Count's wife ran to meet the jester, and besought him to tell her what he knew, and whether he had heard any reports of them.

"But what is the meaning of all this?" replied Tremacoldo, quite astonished at the excitement that was going on all round him.

"I ask you if you have seen Ottorino and Beatrice?" repeated the mother anxiously.

"No, indeed, I have not seen them."

"Then have you heard anything of them?"

"Yes, I heard that they were not yet arrived at Castelletto; so I thought to myself, the festivities can't be over in that case, so I came on at once—a little late, it is true, but——"

"And what were they saying at Sesto?"

"Nothing at all—what would you have them say? And so I came along, and on the road composed a wedding song."

"But was there no one who had seen or heard of them?"

"No one; and to go on with what I was saying—I had prophesied this wedding at Bellano, so you see I had more right than anyone else to make a ballad about it, and here is the very article." So saying, he threw his cloak back, put his hand into his bosom and drew out a paper, which he politely offered to Ermelinda. But in performing this action he uncovered his left side, so that the Count, who was close to him, saw the handle of a dagger shine which Tremacoldo had in his girdle, and recognized it as the dagger of one of the grooms whom he had sent with the bridal pair on their journey to Castelletto.

"Where did you get that dagger?" he inquired in alarm.

"What dagger?"

"The one you have there."

The jester drew it from his side, and put it into the Count's hands, answering, "I bought it yesterday from an armourer at Gallarate."

"What is it? oh, tell me," asked Ermelinda.

"It is Ricciardino's dagger," exclaimed the Count. And his words caused the lady to become deadly pale, and to tremble violently.

"I see," said the jester to himself, "that I have put my foot into a difficulty, and I shan't get out of it for nothing." He looked slyly towards the door of the hall, saw his good horse fastened to a pillar of the portico, the doors wide open, the bridge lowered, and thought for a moment of escaping; but he soon gave up the idea. "No," he said to himself, "Tremacoldo is able to hold his head up wherever he goes. I will not have anyone suspect me of sharing in any villainy. I will wait here, and see what it all means."

To the storm of questions which followed, the jester could only repeat his former answers. He, however, at last got a clue to the meaning of all these complications, which he could not comprehend at first; for he now saw that it referred to the disappearance of Ottorino, his wife, and their suite, in which, as he then learnt, Lupo was included. So Tremacoldo, moved by the distress of the two poor parents, and remembering the kindness with which Ottorino and Lupo had always treated him, and attracted besides by a love for adventure—so powerful in those days, especially when a lady was in the case—resolved to try and trace out the missing party by means of the slight clue he held in his hand, and throw what light he could on this mystery. He imparted his generous determination to Ermelinda and the Count with such tenderness and goodwill, that he quite gained their affections.

The Count warmly accepted the offer, and said to Tremacoldo, "Had not you better take one of my at-

tendants with you? Ambrose shall go, if you like, as he is father to Lupo and Beatrice's waiting-maid, who has also disappeared with the rest; he is a discreet and honest man, and you may depend upon his anxiety to find out all he can."

"No, no," answered the jester, "these are not affairs for more than one to be mixed up in; and a servant of yours showing himself, would spoil everything. Leave it all to me, and let me know where I am to find you when I have anything to tell."

"We will arrange it in this way," answered Ermelinda. "We will stay three days more at Castelletto, exclusive of to-day. If the Lord, in His mercy, sends us good news, we shall hear it sooner where we are. Your efforts may thus be superfluous, and we may the sooner be released; but if He thinks fit to prove us with a longer trial, after that time you will find us at Milan. Listen to me, my friend," she continued; "I know that in this work of charity you have quite another kind of reward in view, but nevertheless, accept my assurance, that from henceforth you shall not need to play the lute for your daily bread."

"I return you many thanks," replied the jester, "but it makes no difference. I tell you from my heart, that I would willingly give, not only the bread I gain by my instrument, but the instrument itself, which is as dear to me as a brother, and in addition, the fingers with which I play on it, to see you relieved and happy."

"May God reward you!"

"And in short, you see, it will be a piece of good luck for me, if my lute can be employed in a work of mercy, before being changed into a psalter, as I hope to do soon; and who knows if you, perhaps, may not make this change easier?"

"The jester is a priest," broke in the Count, to explain to his wife these words, which she otherwise would not have understood; "and now that the interdict is removed, he wishes to give up his present calling and resume his former one, and he, no doubt, hopes you will use your good offices for him with the legate, your uncle."

"Just so," said Tremacoldo. "I am sure you will do the best you can for me. But, however," he added, "as long as I carry on my present trade, I must do so with sprightliness and grace, but where was there ever seen before, a buffoon who had to act in this way, and talk piously like a Franciscan, not to say like a canon? It is really a shame and an abuse, both of the priest's cap and the minstrel's lute." Here he made a deep reverence, and went out humming a tune.

"Minstrel, would'st thou charm the Court?
Gay and blithe then must thou be,
With grim death must, laughing, sport,
And deride his agony.
Ever festive, ever gay,
Though the world should pass away."

After leaving the gate, he turned behind a ravelin, so that they could hear no more of the words of his song. The Count followed him, and having rejoined him under the portico, laid a hand on his shoulder and said, "Listen to me, Tremacoldo. While you are working for us, you will want—I know—you are not rich, and this will do you no harm." And as he spoke he tried to slip into his pocket a purse with money, but he, stepping back and putting his hand behind him, replied:

"No, to-day I will take nothing; that's to say, on this particular day, and for this particular matter, I don't want any reward."

"Perhaps, instead of money, you would prefer——"

"I neither want money nor anything else; look here, am I not rich? I have still a piece of that chain which Ottorino gave me, and here it is, hanging round my neck. I could live like a prince on one of the rings a day, so you see that I have got my larder provided for a good time to come." So saying, he sprung on his horse, which was the one he had won, or rather which had been given him by Arnaldo Vitale, the day he had run against him at the quintain, set off at a foot's pace towards the bridge, and resumed the ditty which had been interrupted by the Count.

"Love sick youths, and Maidens fair,
Men and women, one and all
Who for this or that will care,
As your whim may chance to fall.
Be you rich or be you gay,
Come and keep youth's holiday.

"For the merry rebeck's sound
Scatters care and foul disease,
'Gainst ill-omens famous found,
Even jealous pangs will ease—
Be you rich or be you gay,
Come and keep youth's holiday."

Three days having passed without any news, our poor afflicted travellers returned to Milan; but in the meantime Tremacoldo had not gone to sleep. The first thing he did was to go straight to the shop of the armourer, who had sold him the dagger, and pretending that he wanted to buy a whole suit of armour for a knight, he led him on from one subject to another, till at last they adjourned to a wine shop. Here they emptied a bottle together, and when he saw the armourer somewhat elated, and inclined to chatter, he began to sound and pump him in a round-about way, until he had squeezed him dry, as the saying is.

His companion told him that he had had that dagger to sell, together with a number of other knick-knacks; it had been given him by a relation of his, a vassal and factor of certain nuns living at Rescalinda, and that his relative had acquired it as his share of the plunder of some knights who had been captured one night by brigands, but as to what had become of the prisoners, he did not know, so could give no information.

Possessed of this evidence, Tremacoldo would have wished to press forward to discovery—but how was he to present himself to the factor? How could he enter into particulars without giving cause for suspicion? He therefore spent the week in discussing his pretended bargain with the armourer, holding out constant hopes of closing, and then postponing final settlement from day to day, till at last Sunday arrived. This Sunday was the great feast-day of the district; there were to be

sports, and ceremonies, and a great concourse of people from all the neighbourhood. This was of course the natural sphere of a jester; wherever there were likely to be tumults and crowds, there was his place. On the Saturday before, our Tremacoldo came with his lute round his neck, to fetch the armourer, and they both set off together. On the road he did everything in his power to ingratiate himself with his companion; flattering and coaxing—he tried everything; and the result was, that the numbskull offered to take him to his relation's house, and he, after some persuasion, accepted the invitation.

The steward of the nunnery, to whom the armourer presented the jester as his customer and friend, was very well pleased to lodge him.

In the evening, Tremacoldo sang, played on the lute, and cracked numberless jokes, such as the company had never heard equalled; he spent the night there. In the morning, he went to pursue his vocation at the fair, and returning to dinner, he found six or seven armed men who had been invited, and immediately made up his mind that they were the accomplices of his host in the affair, the rights of which he had so much at heart to discover.

They sat down to table, eat and drank, shouted and gabbled. Tremacoldo kept his ears open, noticed every word and gesture, but could detect nothing. He felt he must bring matters to a point.

It happened that towards the end of the repast, a roasted peacock was placed on the table. This dish was reserved strictly for knightly banquets, but the steward, in private, among friends and relations, and on a feast-day, did not scruple to serve something unlawful to do honour to his guests.

"It belongs to the jester," said Tremacoldo, "to carve the peacock, for we enjoy the privileges of chivalry, though we are not knights," and as he spoke he drew his newly-acquired dagger from his side, and plunged it into the body of the splendid bird, which occupied the centre of the table, as if to take possession of it. The

eyes of all the guests were immediately turned on this weapon, the silver handle of which shone brilliantly, and on the part of the blade which was not inserted in the flesh, might be distinguished gilded flourishes; the soldiers looked at each other, and one said in a decided tone: "Do you mark that?" Then the master of the house, winking at one of the guests who sat opposite him, said, "By-the-bye, what became of those two simpletons?"

"The mountaineer we have still shut up in the fortress," was the answer: "the other has changed his cage, but I don't think he'll sing there much longer."

"I understand," said Tremacoldo to himself; but he looked as if nothing had happened.

When the meal was finished, and the tables cleared, the soldiers invited the new guest and the rest of the party to crack a bottle with them at the castle, which was only a stone's-throw off. They went there all together, and the jester performed such prodigies in his music and singing—improvised such cheerful, jolly songs and quartettes, which, at the same time, were so full of point, and so well adapted to the tastes of those lawless men, that he soon won all their hearts, and when he got up to go in the evening, they made him promise to return the next Sunday, as there was always some fun going on that day in the castle, and there was to be a quintain match. This he agreed to do, but before going out, he kept his eyes well open, and by the scraps of information he obtained, first from one, and then from another, he became pretty certain that Lupo was in the castle, and was shut up in a room looking out on the moat on the north side.

At nightfall, the good minstrel, enveloped in his cloak, made a round of the fort, and after looking well about him to see that the coast was clear, he went on the esplanade up to the window he had his eye on, and having found means to communicate with Lupo, made him understand that he was come to liberate him. The window in question was barricaded by two enormous iron bars, and the wall was thick and massive, so that

there seemed no possibility of putting their scheme into execution.

"The door that leads into the interior is not so inaccessible," said Lupo, "but supposing I were able to pick the lock and get out, we should then be but at the beginning, for I should only find myself inside the castle, with the drawbridge raised, and the gates closely guarded."

"I'll see if I can't get over that difficulty," answered the jester, and told him that he had arranged to return there the next Sunday, and before that day he would come to see him again.

After turning the matter over and over again in his mind, Tremacoldo had two buffoon's costumes made exactly like one another, with certain strange caps, having beneath them a silk net, to imitate chain armour, which could be drawn over the face and represent a visor.

No one could be surprised at any costume worn by those whose trade is to make others laugh. In the middle of Saturday night, Tremacoldo took one of these costumes and caps under his arm, and repairing to Lupo's prison, he stood on the edge of the moat, and by the help of a pole, he passed them in to him separately, explaining to him how he was to use them. They then arranged their plans, localities, and hours; settled on some signals, and then, "Good night! Help yourself, and God will help you," said the minstrel as he took his leave.

The desired Sunday morning came at last. The jester arrived at the castle in a novel dress, with a parti-coloured cap, and found all the party inside ready to welcome him. He sung, played, danced, and performed endless tricks, and drawing over his face the silk network we have mentioned, kept lifting it up and dropping it again, chattering all the time. At last came the moment appointed for the quintain match, in which the soldiers of the castle were to contend with some other men-at-arms from a neighbouring fort. After a few rounds, Tremacoldo presented himself before the most

successful player, offering to run two lances against him, and whoever was adjudged to be the winner should have as his prize the horse of the other.

"Hallo, my friend!" called out the man whom he had challenged, in a voice like a bull—a dark young fellow, covered with hair, and as ugly as sin; "don't think you are going to get off with one of your tricks as you did down at Milan on the day of the tournament, for you won't find such a simpleton as you did then, I can tell you."

"What's the good of telling me that?" replied the buffoon; "the cask can only yield the wine it contains; who ever tried to draw blood out of a stone, or to find a knight's politeness under an ass's skin?"

Everybody laughed at this sally except the great brute at whom it was aimed, who knitted his brows and glared fiercely at the jester; but the latter, without seeming to notice him, came close up to him, and said with one of his comic grins, "Look here, my jewel, this isn't quite fair play; your horse is a great coarse beast, and mine is an elegant little swan in comparison."

"That's true," said one of the leaders; "bring another horse for Tremacoldo, and let his be taken to a stall, to abide the decision of the umpires of the quintain match."

On this a magnificent bay horse, the very one taken from Ottorino, was brought out.

"This'll do capitally," said the jester. "I have not another word to say," and imitating with fantastic grimaces the movements of a knight drawing down his visor, he pulled the network over his face and ordered the signal to be given.

A trumpet then sounded, which was heard all over the castle, and reached the ears of a person about whom no one was thinking just then, except the jester, who felt his heart beat at the sound. His adversary then gave his horse his head, and putting spurs to his side, galloped over the intervening space, struck the mark in the centre, and amid the shouts of "Bravo! bravo!" he returned to the starting-post, set spurs to his horse

again, and drove his lance straight into the visor of the Saracen's head, a feat that was greeted with a fresh storm of applause.

Now came Tremacoldo's turn, but where was he? A page was holding the horse destined for him, but he was not there.

"Tremacoldo! Tremacoldo!" was the cry. "What on earth has become of him?" "He must be playing some of his tricks." "I was sure," said another, "that this challenge was all a sham. But at any rate his horse is here." "Tremacoldo! Tremacoldo!" they called out.

At last he appeared, coming bounding down the steps. To spring on his horse, to grasp his lance, to charge the quintain, strike it, to smash the pole on which it was fixed and overturn the whole erection, was the work of a minute. The jester, or rather (to make no further mystery to our readers, who will have already guessed the secret) Lupo, dressed exactly like him, and masked by the fine network drawn over his face, having made that splendid stroke, while the shouts of applause yet rent the skies, turned his horse rapidly round, crossed the courtyard, and passing through the barbican and over the drawbridge, galloped off like the wind.

The crowd rushed frantically out after him and saw him take the high road and ride straight away.

"Tremacoldo! Tremacoldo! the horse is yours! you are the winner!" they shouted. But he kept galloping away as if the devil was at his heels. Innumerable were the conjectures as to this behaviour.

"Perhaps he thinks he has lost, and is running away without paying." "Oh, I dare say. Do you suppose the jester does not know as well as we do, that to upset the quintain is the best stroke of all." "Well, then, what does it all mean?" "It's some dodge of his to turn into ridicule that unlicked cub, who tried to frighten him with his ugly face. He wants to make fun of him."

"Do you mean to say he is coming back?"

"Why not? do you suppose he intends to leave his horse here? a pretty idea! as if he wouldn't return."

While the false Tremacoldo was making the best of his way off, the real one was hidden in the castle. How on earth was he to get out, without the trick being discovered? Trust him for that, for he has thought it all out, and already provided for everything.

Besides the principal gate, there was in the fortress a postern, which opened into the second courtyard where the stables were, and which the jester had made the scene for his projects of escape. He had scarcely finished giving the challenge, when he took the keeper of this gate aside, and telling him that the wager, as seemed probable, was an entire joke, persuaded him to keep it open for him, and to have his horse in readiness, giving him to understand that he meant to go out secretly by that exit, and to come back unexpectedly through the great gate for a bit of fun; he would soon see what a joke it would be, fit to make them all burst with laughter.

His companion being a cheery, simple sort of a fellow, agreed to everything he required; the doors were thrown open, the horse was found all ready, he himself gave the buffoon a leg up into the saddle; shut the door very gently as soon as he saw him go out, and then ran back into the principal courtyard to see him return. There was not a soul to be seen there, for they were all outside on the glacis looking after Lupo, who, dressed like Tremacoldo, and appearing exactly like him, was going like the wind; and our simpleton himself just came up in time to see his back a long way off.

"What is the meaning of all this?" he said to himself; "I only let him out a minute ago, and there he is out there. Why, he must have got a demon behind him! What is it all about?"

So away went Lupo along the high road at full speed, while Tremacoldo was doing the same through the woods below, and at nightfall they met at Milan, at the house of Count del Balzo.

You may imagine how crestfallen those scamps at

the castle were, when they perceived that the minstrel did not return, and besides finding the prison empty, saw that they had been cheated out of the best horse in their stable, and knew for their comfort, that the report of the affair would bring down the wrath of their master on their heads.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THIS favourite Lupo of ours had had so many hair-breadth escapes in his life—his parents had so often been in anxiety for his sake—they had so often felt the comfort of seeing him emerge from mortal peril safe and sound, that, to say the truth, it would seem as if they ought to have become hardened by this time. But this was not the case, and the reader can hardly imagine how hearty was the affectionate welcome he met with on this occasion.

Their joy was, however, dashed by the thought of poor Lauretta, of whom he could tell his parents nothing, nor they him.

Ermelinda and the Count made the falconer's son repeat the minutest particulars of the strange adventures in which he had been involved, though, evidently, against his will; but the youth could give them but small satisfaction—since the moment when he had left Beatrice at Gallarate, to go to Seprio in search of Ottorino, he knew nothing of the vanished party. He himself was captured treacherously by some armed men, before reaching the castle, his eyes bandaged, and after being dragged hither and thither in various directions, he was at last thrown into the prison, from which he had just been rescued by Tremacoldo.

Everything connected with the affair was mysterious; the only clue to it was from the incident of Marco's letter, on receiving which Ottorino had hastened to Castel Seprio.

It is true that the signature might have been forged by those who had contrived the plot against the bridal pair. Lupo was of this opinion, and the Count, who, at the first mention of Marco's name had been much per-

turbed, welcomed this explanation with avidity, and the determination of a person desirous to catch at any reassuring suggestion. But Ermelinda, who knew of the love of Visconti for her daughter, felt certain that she had in truth been carried off by him. She would not, however, reveal this to her husband, for fear of being prevented by his cowardly fears from pursuing a plan she had proposed to herself, and which seemed to have some promise of success.

She therefore summoned Lupo privately to her own apartments, and there said to him—

"Pray attend to me; I have a very serious and important charge to lay upon you. Will you undertake it for the sake of your former master and mistress? There is no one whom I can trust as much as I do you."

"Oh, my gracious lady!" replied Lupo, much affected, and also a little mortified by the hesitation with which the Countess spoke; "Am I not your own Lupo, your servant? the first bread I ever ate, did I not eat it in your house? my father, my mother, my poor sister, have they not always slept under your roof? have they not all been clothed, fed, protected by you?"

"Enough, don't recall it now——"

"Yes, I must indeed recall it; for you must not believe that I, wild as I am, have forgotten it all, even for a moment; and then, without going any further, was not my life granted by Marco at the request of your noble husband, in compliance with your entreaties and those of that angel—of your——"

But here he stopped, perceiving the emotion the name he was about to pronounce was raising in the soul of the unhappy mother, who, drying her eyes, answered—

"I know that you are a good fellow; I know it well."

"Good, do you say? I should be a wretched, villainous brute if I was otherwise. Now then, my lady, be so good as to tell me how you have thought of employing me; so that I may be as useful to you as I am faithful."

"I want to send you to Lucca, to bear to Marco a letter from me," said Ermelinda.

"And is that all?" replied Lupo. "To present my-

self before Marco! You could not have given me a commission more acceptable to me."

"Listen, Lupo; I know that if he is not utterly changed from what he once was—if his former nature has not entirely disappeared, you do not run any risk."

"Forgive me, my gracious mistress, but this is a kind of thing that cannot be imagined for a moment. The idea that I could ever suspect Marco! a man who is the prince of men! Do you not know that, even if instead of being the poor devil I am, I was a great baron, a prince, or even a king, and at the same time his greatest enemy, I would put my head in his lap, and sleep as quietly and safely as if I had laid it on my own pillow? And then, if you will believe me, and though you may think it extravagant, the love and devotion I feel for that man is so great, that if he wished to kill me it would not appear hard to me, and I should think it a good way of losing my life, so much so, that, next to sacrificing it for the Faith, I could not desire a better end."

"Then you will go there?"

"With all my heart! and I assure you I am longing to be off."

"What makes me most anxious," said Ermelinda, "is the fear that those who interrupted your journey before, may again play you an ill turn on the road."

"And for that reason I will set off directly, and secretly," said Lupo; "so that they may not have time to make preparations; there's a story I have heard about the fox who once left his tail in the trap, and after that took pretty good care not to let himself be caught a second time."

"Well, then, here is the letter," said the Countess. "I feel, also, that the more haste in these cases the better."

"I will run down," returned Lupo, "and eat a few mouthfuls in haste, kiss my father and mother, and then set off at once."

"Farewell, my good Lupo," said the Countess; "the Lord be with you." But, summoning him suddenly back: "And if, while you are on the road, the jester

discovers anything, I will send a courier off to tell you. You know that Tremacoldo has promised me to search everywhere and to make every effort to put himself on their track."

"I know—well, we will keep to this agreement. And I should like to tell you one thing before leaving you."

"Certainly—tell me."

"I want to say that if ever you need me—but it is hardly necessary, for I am already bound to you by too close ties; and, besides, you are so good and kind to all—but there, I have nothing else to say." And, with these words, he went off on his errand.

As he came out of the gates to begin his journey, Lupo suddenly came upon Lodrisio, who was passing by on horseback, accompanied by two squires. He was acquainted with this noble, and knew that, although there was an old grudge between him and Ottorino, neither of them had ever passed the limits of those laws of civility which, as everybody knows, survive friendship; and so, taking off his cap, he bowed to his master's relation and went on his way, without remarking the sudden start of surprise that the knight could not control on catching sight of him, and far from suspecting that the same object, though with a most different motive, occupied his mind and that of the hateful individual he had just come across; and so he pursued his journey in the contrary direction.

We will now leave Lupo, to follow Lodrisio, who, having received the day before a letter from Pelagrua, was on his way to the castle of Rosate, to confer on their common concerns.

This knight, after he had recovered from his first astonishment at the sight of his prisoner, whom he had fancied in a very different place from Milan, and in a very different state from that of a traveller, said a few words in the ear of one of his squires, who made an affirmative sign, and remained behind.

"What demon can have brought that fellow here?" was the inward thought of the rider, as he hurried on to Rosate. "Will nothing succeed with me? there must

be some unlucky star, some evil influence over me, at this period! And where can the rascal be going in travelling-garb? most likely to his hills. By-the-by, his countrymen there have not had their debts paid, but their day of reckoning will come, and they shall pay me, once for all."

The squire in attendance on Lodrisio, seeing his master so out of temper, did not dare to say a word, and followed him in silence, casting an occasional stealthy glance at him, like a beaten dog with his tail between his legs. The knight went pricking along, pondering over all his various anxieties, about Marco, Beatrice, Ottorino—how to remedy this, how to provide for that, so that he arrived at Rosate, without once opening his lips.

Here he retired into a private chamber with Pelagrua, and asked at once if the last courier had arrived from Lucca.

"He is come, and here are Marco's papers," replied the seneschal, giving him a packet of letters. He opened them, and, sitting down, read them in silence for some time, while the other remained standing up, cap in hand. When he had finished, Lodrisio shook his head, and said, shrugging his shoulders, "It is as usual; the Germans are going on badly, and the Lucchese worse. The former are like a bottomless cask, which the river Po could never fill, when at its highest; the latter are so stingy, that they would not give a farthing to save their skin from the Turks, or from the devil himself: the one set are always howling for money, and the others as constantly screech out a refusal; and Marco has to act as go-between, and keep the peace between the two. To-day he has to put a soldier in irons, and to-morrow to hang a citizen, so he has to keep up a perpetual see-saw; the only result being that he offends both parties. In short, he is so disgusted and indignant with it all, that he is nearly decided on the course that he would not hear of before, viz., to sell his suzerainty to the Florentines, and wash his hands of the whole concern."

"Should this come to pass," said Pelagrua, "he will be glad to attend to his affairs here again."

"Certainly; and that thread, by which we reckoned on holding him, will be but one among many, I can see."

"One among many," replied the seneschal, biting his nails. "I shall be glad if we get off as well as that. I am sadly afraid lest this should spoil our cards so much, that we may not get a game out of them at all."

"Where do you get those foolish fears from?"

"I'll soon tell you. I dropped a hint to Marco in the most distant way, to prepare him a little for the present state of affairs, as one may say."

"And how did he receive it?"

"Far from receiving it favourably, he seemed as if he were going to eat my poor messenger up alive, and he wrote to me that I must not meddle any more between Beatrice and Ottorino. Suppose his affairs have cured his love?"

"All the better! If this madness leaves him, he will give himself up more to serious undertakings—to his own interests; which, in the end, are ours."

"I agree—but in the meantime what am I to do with this fair lady?"

"~~What we~~ settled before—to keep her, by fair or foul means, to wait for Marco's pleasure. Don't you believe that when he returns and finds her here, all in the bloom of her beauty, he will be grateful to you; even supposing his first mania for her to have somewhat subsided?"

"May Heaven grant it! You don't know what her whims and fancies are! Fancy! she has been here twenty days, and she actually still believes she is at Castelletto. I have never dared to——"

"Much ado about nothing! What a fool you are!"

"What do you mean?"

"Why, when you see you can do nothing by gentle means, you should change your tactics; you don't know anything about women."

"But, I tell you, a breath would blow this one out."

"Let her do what she will, but don't mince matters any more with her."

"It is very easy for you to talk like this, but you should have been here the fourth day she was in the Castle; she was seized with a desperate fever, and I was afraid that it would be the end of her, and that any hour might be her last. If she really had died, it would have been a pretty kettle of fish! And you must remember the other girl is with her."

"The waiting-maid you mean? a great matter indeed! Well, how at last did you get her round?"

"I got her round by means of a letter from her lover, which I let her have."

"A letter from Ottorino!" cried Lodrisio, with an expression half agitated and half incredulous.

"From Ottorino—but don't be angry, for I stand for Ottorino."

"You wrote the letter?"

"I wrote it and imitated his hand."

"And what did you say?"

'First of all, I was obliged to explain my delay in coming to see her, was I not? So I treated her to some fair words—how Marco had received me most affectionately, that he is desirous of sending me into Tuscany, and does not leave me to myself for a moment, day or night. That I have not dared as yet to inform him of our marriage, finding that his mind was still the same on that subject, but that when I had been able to be of great service to him, I hoped to induce him to hear reason—in short, a thousand fibs of this sort, filled up with the usual sugar-plums of lovers, tender oaths, and hopes, to soothe the sweet martyr of love."

Lodrisio burst out into a coarse laugh, and then added:

"And did she take it all in, suspecting nothing?"

"I firmly believe," answered the seneschal, "that if the letter had fallen into Ottorino's own hands, I declare I would wager my life that he would have believed he had written it himself."

"Well—then?"

"Then she answers, and Ottorino replies to her; she writes a second time, and Ottorino likewise, and so on,

everything goes as smoothly as possible—and if you could only see the sweet, tender things she writes me! the devotion with which she opens my letters, devours them with her eyes, and weeps over them! and then how tenderly she folds them with her white hands, and puts them in her bosom, and then takes them out to read them again, and kiss them! I enjoy the sight through a chink in the wall, and I swear to you, the game begins quite to amuse me."

"You dried-up old mummy! You old Pharisee!" said Lodrisio, giving him a cuff on his face, in joke; "now with these childish tricks, you have been spending your time, so that twenty days have been wasted."

"But I have not wasted them at all. I have begun already to give things a turn—but one must work very cautiously, for the least thing makes her nervous, and she is so delicate, that she would be swooning directly."

"Well, tell me quickly, how far you have gone as yet?"

"I have begun to play off a little jealousy, arising from Marco's continually speaking of her, and praising her up to the skies."

"And what does she say to that?"

"She swears and protests that she is devoted to me, and me alone, as you may imagine; but still you have but to throw a seed into a female heart, and it always takes root and bears fruit. After all, girls and women, rich and poor, they are all made of the same clay."

"Well, you have not done badly on the whole, only you are too long about it. We shall have only got half way by the end of the year, and we have no time to lose, I can tell you; for Marco may arrive within the next two months, if not earlier—and now, on what terms are you with this whimsical girl?"

"Now, she is expecting me in a couple of days. I have taken this line, in order to recover her from the distress she was thrown into at being disappointed of her mother's promised visit. When she first got this news, she appeared quite comforted, but since yesterday, for some reason or other, she is more downhearted than she was

at first. She says nothing, but only weeps, and will not touch food. I only hope she will hold out, for even if I am able to supply her with another letter to-morrow, the deceit cannot last much longer, she must begin to suspect something soon, and then I shall be at my wit's end how to keep her quiet."

"The chief thing," said Lodrisio, "is to bring the thing to a head as soon as possible, for I have another bit of news for you—Lupo has escaped."

"Escaped!" exclaimed Pelagrua, in alarm, raising his eyebrows.

"Yes, escaped, and I saw him with my own eyes, on my way here; but I have placed him in good hands; before sunset—— but never mind, when I have written to Lucca, we will talk it over again, and see what we had better do."

After writing as proposed, and arranging his plans, the seneschal of Rosate, towards evening, conducted Lodrisio by winding passages and secret corridors into a dark room, from whence, looking through some chinks, you could see all over the room, where Beatrice was alone with her faithful maid.

Ottorino's forsaken wife was seated on a sumptuous couch, in a languid attitude, resting her pale face on her hand. A light garment, as white as snow, drooped from her shoulders, and wrapped her in its ample folds. Her long fair hair, parted in the middle, followed the outline of her face, which stood out deadly white against the gold, not relieved by the slightest touch of colour, except the lips, which were of a faint red. Her great blue eyes were the most striking feature in her face, for with the softness of angelic innocence, they yet expressed the fire of a generous soul. While they shone with quiet maidenly pride, they had also a tender and liquid glance, appealing, as it were, for sympathy and affection, and their mute, supplicating expression, was increased by the piteous circumstances in which she now found herself.

Lauretta, seated at a table placed between her and her mistress, was working at some embroidery, from which she had just raised her head.

Beatrice, with her cheek resting on her hand, had her face turned towards the maiden, as if watching the work —but she did not really see it, for her whole soul at that moment was overshadowed by a secret terror.

At last she rose to her feet and walked wearily to the open window. She leant on the sill and gazed in silence on the scene before her. The setting sun, slowly sinking behind the crest of a distant wood, shed its level rays on the wide plain, only broken by the sparse, unrefreshing shadows cast by a solitary tree, appearing at rare intervals on that vast expanse of desert. The perpetual, melancholy croaking of frogs filled the oppressive, motionless air, while from the lakes and surrounding marshes there rose a white mist, which, veiling slightly the nearer objects of the landscape, gradually enveloped the more distant ones till the horizon was completely lost to sight. The feeble rays of the sun, which had at first with difficulty pierced this close and clammy veil, became gradually fainter and fainter, till, as the mists gathered strength and the sun finally set, all light was extinguished, as when the eyes are closed in their last sleep.

A sunset so different in all its characteristics from those glorious departing rays which she had so often watched disappear behind her own dear native mountains, recalled, with a bitter pang, those loved scenes to the unhappy exile. She rose from the window, seated herself again by the little table, where a lamp was burning, placed there an instant before by the careful hand of Lauretta, and sinking into a chair, she exclaimed, in the agony of her heart, "Oh, my God, my suffering is greater than I can bear!"

There was a moment's silence, then the faithful attendant went to the balcony to close the outer shutters, when the faint sound of a lute reached her ear. Lauretta paused, with her hand on the shutter; her mistress placed her finger on her lips, and listened eagerly. That plaintive tune was surely familiar to her. She rose up with restored strength, returned swiftly to the window, and leant out again to catch every sound; then she said,

in an undertone to Lauretta, "It is the prelude to the Rondinella; but hark! the song is going to begin." And in truth the voice, though somewhat distant, fell distinctly on her ear, accompanied by the feeble and melodious sound of the instrument.

Swallow, ever wand'ring swallow,
Alighting near my cell,
Where, day by day, thy plaintive lay
Dost, soft recording, tell.
What would'st thou in thy song declare,
Wand'ring Pilgrim of the air?

In drear oblivion, sad, alone,
Left by thy cruel mate,
Do thy tears flow, to mourn my woe,
Or for thy widowed state?
No matter, sing the grief we share,
Wand'ring Pilgrim of the air.

Yet, less than mine, thy misery,
Bird with untiring wings,
Whose pinions sweep, o'er lake and steep,
Tho' sad thy carol rings,
Calling thy mate, with ceaseless care,
Wand'ring Pilgrim of the air.

Oh! if like thee! . . . . But here, in prison
Confined by hapless fate,
Where light of day, nor sun's sweet ray
Can never penetrate.
Whence, scarce ascends my plaintive prayer
To thee, sweet Pilgrim of the air.

With swift step cometh chill September,
When thou away will flee
To foreign lands, and far-off strands,
Where earth, and sky, and sea
Will greet thee with their welcome fair,
Wand'ring Pilgrim of the air.

And each day, than the last, still sadder,
Which bids me wake to tears,
Mid storms that blow, and winter snow,
Thy song will fill mine ears;
Mourning o'er me with tender care,
Wand'ring Pilgrim of the air.

When the spring-tide lures thee homewards,
A cross will mark this spot.
Stay then thy flight, and there alight,
Sweet bird, forget it not!
And let thy song calm peace declare,
Wand'ring Pilgrim of the air.

CHAPTER XXVII.

"THAT must be Tremacoldo," cried Beatrice, quite revived directly the song had ceased; "I recognize his voice. Oh, perhaps he has come to give me some news. If I could only see him! If I could see a face I knew, that would give me confidence and clear up all my doubts."

"But what doubts have you? For mercy's sake, why are you so agitated? Your husband will be here in a couple of days; he has promised you this. Why then——"

"Hush!" interrupted the mistress, putting her finger on her lips.

They remained for some time longer in silence, hoping for the song to recommence; but they heard nothing more except the ill-omened howling of dogs belonging to the different hovels scattered over the plains.

Beatrice, having at last lost all hope, returned to her seat by the table, and looking at the damsel who was closing the window, she said, continuing her interrupted speech:

"Do you ask, why I am so suspicious? and why I am so agitated?"

And she uttered these words in the almost agonized tone of one who has a tremendous secret to reveal; but then she turned her eyes on her companion in misfortune, who, at that moment, came to sit down by her, and sighing deeply, said no more.

"What is it?" said Lauretta, anxiously. "Do you know anything fresh? Is there some mystery? Tell me, pray tell me!"

"No, no, be quiet; it is nothing."

"How can I be quiet? Since yesterday I have noticed you have had something on your mind that you wished to hide from me. Do tell me!"

"Leave me alone," repeated the young lady.

But the damsel, taking her hand affectionately, and pressing it between hers, said, in a voice full of emotion:

"Dear Beatrice, my sweet mistress, have you not promised me that you would share all the good and evil in your life with me?"

"Oh, my good Lauretta!" replied Beatrice, trying to restrain her tears, "it is a great addition to my grief to think of you, who, for my sake, have left your loving parents and your peaceful home for an uncertain fate. But God is merciful, he will save you. Believe me, that I pray to him for you often in the midst of my mortal anguish."

"Alas!" said the maiden, still more dismayed, "your words point to some misfortune. Don't let me be kept in ignorance; for God's sake relieve my suspense."

Beatrice in reply rose up, and opened a casket on her table.

"Do you see," she said, "the papers contained in this?"

"Yes; they are the letters which your husband writes to you every day."

"So I believed, and that was the last thread on which my life hung; now that thread is broken—the letters did not come from Ottorino."

"May the Lord have mercy on us!" cried Lauretta, becoming as pale as death. "But who could—how did you find it out?"

"Yesterday you brought me this white rose which I am wearing in my bosom, did you not?"

"Yes; it was given me by the old woman who brings our food."

"And you told me the seneschal's wife sent it to me?"

"I did."

"Now do you know who she is?"

"I know she is Pelagrua's wife, the woman whom your mother received into the castle the day when she came there with her child."

"Well, she remembers that kindness in these days of my misery, and cannot bear to see me any longer the

sport of these infernal machinations. Between these rose leaves I found a letter hidden which warns me of treachery. Imagine my horror when I made this discovery! Who can tell what has become of Ottorino? Who can assure me that he is still alive; for I cannot believe that he has forsaken me. Where are my parents? And where are we ourselves? Oh, my God! in whose hands can we be? If this really is Ottorino's castle, and not rather—for there is nothing cruel and terrible which I do not imagine."

"Oh, mercy! mercy! on us poor creatures!" exclaimed Lauretta.

"Now, I will tell you," continued her mistress, "the principal cause of my terror. You must know that the night when I went with my father and aunt to the banquet at Marco Visconti's palace——"

But at this moment her story was interrupted by a noise at the door which opened on the gallery. Some one had knocked, and the waiting-maid, trembling all over, was getting up to answer it, when Beatrice drew her back, and said quietly to her:

"Don't move from here; I will not have you open to any one."

"Lauretta! Lauretta!" the well-known voice of Pelagrua called from outside, "there is a knight here with news of Ottorino, and he wishes to speak at once with your mistress."

"Say to him," said she, under her breath, "that at this late hour I can see no one, but that I will receive him to-morrow."

"To-morrow! Let him come to-morrow. She cannot see him now."

Thus the waiting-maid spoke through the door in an uncertain voice, shaking all over, as if seized with an ague fit.

"He must speak to her this moment," cried Pelagrua; "he has some good news to give her. Now, open the door; it will be better for her. Now, are you going to open? yes or no? Silly girl! You had better take care what you are about!"

And all this time he went on belabouring the door with his hands and feet, but in vain; for the two prisoners, clasped in each other's arms, and trembling like two frightened doves, never answered a word; and the door could not be undone from without, as it was fastened within with a large bolt.

After a time the noise ceased, as also did Pelagrua's voice, and silence again reigned. The two terrified women were just beginning to breathe again, when they felt behind a draught, which blowing suddenly on the slight flame of the lamp, nearly extinguished it. They both quickly turned in that direction, and through an opening in the wall, which had been concealed by the hangings, they saw two men advance into the room.

Lauretta, covering her eyes with her hands, uttered a sharp scream, and sank on the couch; but Beatrice, rising with dignity to her feet, leant one hand on the table, and turning to Pelagrua, who, as well as Lodrisio, she recognised, she said, with a calm and stately manner:

"Seneschal, you have, it seems to me, mistaken this room. It belongs to me, whom you are accustomed to call your master's wife!"

The anger the girl felt at this uncourteous and abominable behaviour had overcome her alarm. She felt her spirit and her strength all at once return. Her cheeks regained their colour; her eyes shone with the vivid light which had so long left them; and a degree of security and fortitude was expressed in her whole person.

The two rogues were struck with surprise, and even with a momentary, but irresistible feeling of reverence. The diabolical eyes of Pelagrua fell beneath the maiden's glance, and even Lodrisio seemed at first quite disconcerted; his cold and cruel smile was discomposed, the jesting and familiar words died on his lips, with which he was about to insult his victim, and bowing his head in proof of a humility at any rate sincere for a time, he stammered out:

"Forgive me, lady. I did not think——" and was about to retrace his steps; but then recovering himself,

added, "I hoped as I came to speak to you of Ottorino, my news would have been a passport to your presence."

Beatrice, whose shadowy fears had taken a more solid form at the sight of her husband's implacable enemy, replied to him without being able to conceal a sudden shudder which thrilled her whole frame:

"Sir knight, do not insult the misery of an innocent creature. I tremble at the idea of being in your power, as he is perhaps, also, of whom you have just spoken, and whose name on your lips only seems to me as a snare. If this be so, I have no other defence but tears and indignant words. I, a weak woman, entrapped into this unknown abode, far from all who would protect me, with no other witness of my persecution but this poor girl." Here she pointed to her damsel, who raised her eyes a little, cheered by these words, hoping that they would touch their tormentors' hearts. "I am in your hands," continued Beatrice, in a tone that seemed almost inspired, "I am like a reed that you can break at your pleasure; but there is a God above us, to whom the most hidden corner of the earth is visible, and before whom all strength is powerless; a God who sees the tears of the afflicted, and will demand an account from those who cause them to flow."

Lodrisio, intensely irritated at finding himself unmasked, and braved in this way by a child, and ashamed of Pelagrua's presence and of his own first uncontrollable impulse of diffidence and respect, had now resumed his former character, and that air of bold, sneering familiarity, which he had dropped for a time.

"Listen to me, my young lady," he said; "do you think these arrogant airs suit a pretty maiden like yourself? They don't become you at all, and you had better lay them aside;" and so saying, he advanced towards her.

"Do not come near me!" cried the girl, in great alarm, and then running to the window, she flung it open with all her force. "Keep away from me!"

"Be quiet, you mad child, I am not going to eat you. Look at me—I won't move; and I will step back again

if you please. Are you satisfied now?—what would you have! I only wanted to speak to you for your good."

"For my good?" said the maiden, "then go away at once; that is all the good you can do me."

"Is there nothing else I can do for you?"

"Ah, yes! you can, indeed; you can take me out of this anguish, restore me to my parents, and let me die in peace in the arms of my poor mother. Oh, do this, if you have any mercy in you; do it for the sake of all that is dear to you in this world; do it for the love of God."

Lauretta, frightened to death, held her mistress by her dress, fearing that, in her despair, she might throw herself from the balcony, on the edge of which she was standing; and Pelagrua never ceased making deprecating signs to quiet and reassure her.

As soon as Beatrice had finished speaking, Lodrisio continued, in cruel, pitiless tones:

"Do you think I mean to do you any harm, child? You are making yourself of too much importance; for I assure you I am not thinking about you at all, so don't be afraid that I am going to injure you; stand up, and look me in the face, for I am not a monster, and listen to what I have to say to you. I see that you already know more about things in general than I thought; I am glad of it, for we shall come to an agreement more rapidly. You must know, then, that Ottorino, who was to become your husband—"

"Is he still alive?" exclaimed the girl, in breathless anxiety.

"Let me finish quietly—alive or not, you will have nothing to do with him in future."

Beatrice trembled all over, so that the knight added quickly:

"Yes, he is alive; make yourself easy, for he is alive."

"And I can assure you also," broke in Pelagrua, "that he is safe and sound, and will soon depart for his projected journey to the Holy Land."

"Do you mean without me?" exclaimed Beatrice.

"No, that cannot be true! How cruel you are to torment me in this way! What have I done to you? What harm have I ever done you?" And, overcone with anguish, she bent her head down, and burst into an agony of tears, which, however, she soon cut short, raising her head in fear, lest someone should approach her. The tears she had already shed continued to flow silently, in two streams, down her cheeks into her sorrowful bosom; but her face had already assumed that dignified tranquillity which makes grief sublime.

In the meantime Pelagrua, glancing at his companion, pursed up his lips, and shrugged his shoulders, as if to say: "What do you think of your fine plans? You would act according to your own ideas; see what you have done." But the wicked knight only answered him with a shake of his head, and an impatient gesture, which might be translated into common speech in this way: "Get away, you fool, leave me alone;" or something of the sort. After which, he turned again to the girl, and said:

"You are weeping, poor child. I really pity you; you have cared for him for a long time, and now must tear him from your heart; but what can you do? You must make a virtue of necessity. Love passes; you will see, very soon, believe me, it will all be gone. And then, to speak clearly to you, if you really are fond of him, you would wish, above everything, to save his life? Now, do you know that his life and death are in your hands?"

"Oh, what do you say?" exclaimed Beatrice, struck with a new terror; "and can I put faith in your words? Is there not some deceit hidden in them? Have pity on me—on a poor, forsaken, tormented creature! Tell me the truth; look at me" (and as she spoke she clasped her hands across her chest). "I pray to you with the same agony with which, in the last moments of your life, you yourself will implore the supreme Judge to give you His pardon; grant this my prayer as you will wish Him to grant yours at that tremendous moment; tell me, by the eternal safety of your soul, or by its

eternal damnation, tell me if this danger of Ottorino is real, and what I can do to save him."

The villain, who, like even the worst men of his age, believed in God and in a future life after his own fashion, could not help feeling a little shaken by these words, spoken in tones that seemed almost inspired. After a few minutes which he spent in summoning up his wonted audacity, he recovered himself and, dropping the familiarity of his tone, he answered with perceptible agitation:

"The danger is real—yes, I can guarantee that on my own soul—and it is true that you can save him."

"And where is he? And what is the peril? And what can I do for him?"

"Oh, you want to know too much at once. There are things, my lady, which cannot be spoken of, and which it is not well to ask about. All I can tell you now is this—that if you will be sensible, Ottorino need not die. I promise you that, on my faith as a Christian knight, and to show my sincerity, I call upon God to strike this hand of mine with leprosy if I have any intention of deceiving you. Ottorino will not die; he may go away into Palestine, as the seneschal was saying, but it must be your part to persuade him to go, for it is the best thing for himself that he could do."

"And what do you want of me? Tell me how I can save him. If my blood—my life——"

"No, poor child—keep yourself calm. Do not look at me with those frightened eyes; come forward, sit down, and be at your ease; do not suspect me, nor any one else, for all here wish to pay as much respect to you as to a queen; and you are the mistress here, this is your own house."

"Is it really so? Then this is the fortress of Castelletto. I am indeed in the house of my husband."

"Have done with that expression! Ottorino is not your husband."

Beatrice raised her hands to heaven, and remained quite stupefied, without uttering a word, and only staring at her tormentor, who continued:

"That nonsensical ceremony you went through at

Milan has no meaning whatever; you are still an unmarried maiden, and can give your hand to whom best pleases you. And do you wish to know in whose castle you are? It belongs to a great baron; to a powerful and formidable noble, before whom even princes bend with respect; and he bends to nothing except the beauty of your face."

Lauretta, frightened to death, but seeing that her mistress could not speak, asked in a trembling voice, "Oh, my God, where then are we?"

"At Rosate," answered the other, quickly; "in Marco Visconti's castle."

On hearing these words, Ottorino's wife fell in a dead swoon in her attendant's arms, who, amidst her tears, drew her to the bed, and raising her, placed her on it, repulsing with horror and loathing the wicked hands which offered to help in this pious duty.

While these things were going on at Rosate, Lupo, tired of travelling all day, dismounted at a small inn, and put his horse up in a stable, and after attending to it with his own hands, went into the kitchen to get some supper. It was got ready in a few minutes; the traveller placed himself at the table, and refreshed himself with such fare as the place afforded, and then asked the host to find him a bed to throw himself on and sleep.

"I will give you one in a room close by," said the landlord, and taking a lamp, he preceded his guest to the place in question; but they had not yet left the kitchen, when two armed men entered, one of whom, after glancing at Lupo, slapped the landlord familiarly on the back, and said to him, "Jacopotto, here we are, two men and two horses, and shall not go off till dawn."

The host put down the light, turned to Lupo, and said he would come back directly, and then taking the new comer by the arm, led him to the chimney, where he leant down to uncover a pot of broth with some mutton in it, and said, "See how savoury it smells."

The man to whom these words were addressed also bent forward, as if to get a better view, and, approaching the innkeeper, whispered something in his ear.

He replied aloud, "Now, I will take you to the stable, where this stranger has also got a horse. It will be rather difficult to get three in, but we will do our best."

So saying, they both went out, and were soon followed by the other man-at-arms, who had as yet not spoken.

Lupo, who suspected something underhand, without seeming to observe anything, sauntered to the door opening on the stable-yard, and saw the host engaged in earnest conversation with his two friends on one side of it. On seeing him they separated, and went outside the gate one by one, to continue their conversation in the road, as he supposed.

"Who can these soldiers be?" he said to himself, suspiciously. "There must be something underhand in all this; I must be on my guard." He looked to his sword and dagger, and said, "I must indeed keep my wits about me."

The host soon returned, and under pretence of wishing to give him better accommodation, offered him a different room to the first, saying, it was quieter, and had a better bed in it.

Lupo did not believe in all this apparent anxiety, which only confirmed his suspicions that some trick was intended; so he replied with another artifice, that as two fresh horses had arrived he must look after his own, which was a dangerous animal, and must therefore sleep in the stable, and nothing his host could urge was able to shake his determination.

He then went to the stable, and stroked his faithful horse, which turned to neigh to him in answer, saying to himself he had better go off at once. But then he reflected "the beast is tired, and may well be so, poor thing; fifty miles at one stretch. To-morrow as much, and so on."

Meanwhile he went on caressing the good charger, which had again returned to his corn.

"Besides, how should I get along, on these roads, and at this time of night? I must wait till morning, and keep awake meanwhile, the nights are not long, and I can well watch for four or five hours. I will make it up to-morrow by sleeping on my horse."

So having settled this, he threw himself on a heap of straw, with a firm determination not to go to sleep.

He then began to reflect as to why the host should be so anxious all at once to give him a more convenient room, especially as he was unknown to him, and certainly had not a very aristocratic appearance. He could not, moreover, make out why the host should have been so unwilling to trust him with a light during the night, for fear of his setting the place on fire—and the result was, that after running the whole matter over in his mind, he felt sure that the affair was not at all satisfactory.

At last, by dint of recalling minutely to his mind every look, even the most transient, of those three sinister countenances, he remembered to have noticed a peculiar leer on one of them which he had a confused notion of having seen somewhere before. Racking his brains a little more closely, he thought he could detect a slight impression that had been left upon it by something very similar; and after thinking over the matter again and again, he seemed for a moment to raise the veil that obstructed his recollections, and then again to let it drop. Yet across that veil ever and anon an image seemed to flash, and to grow more and more distinct, which a secret feeling told him had not existed there very long; and the more he kept this image before his mind's eye, the more he was confirmed in that opinion.

The next thing was to think over the various persons he had seen between his escape and the present moment. So he tried to remember every particular of his ride from Rescalinda to Milan, and every one's face whom he had met on the road; but he could not conjure up anything bearing the faintest resemblance to that demoniacal leer —then he ran over in his mind the Count and Countess and the members of their household. Nothing there. Then again—oh, yes—he had remounted and ridden through the courtyard gates. "Ah, that was it!" he exclaimed to himself. "I have got it! That traitorous grin!" And, in fact, he had observed it that very day on the face of one of Lodrisio's attendants, whom he remembered to have stumbled upon while in the very act of leaving the house.

"You are very nicely disguised, you scamp!" he thought, "but I know you! That's the man, I'll lay my life on it!"

Then he thought the plot must be deeply laid, and not unlikely to be connected with that to which he and his master had before fallen victims; and to the faces of the three ruffians who had been so long floating before his imagination, he now added a fourth—that of a still more consummate scoundrel, by name Lodrisio.

In the midst of these reflections a sudden thought came into his head: "How can such a rascal as this be so great a friend of Marco's?"

Now it is scarcely credible, but so it was, that the mere fact of that hero's name flitting across Lupo's brain, had the effect of dissipating, by degrees, all those ideas that had been rushing through it so recently and with such rapidity.

This did not take place, however, without his hearing from time to time the voice of an internal monitor bidding him to be on his guard. This sent him back again to his first conjectures, which got the mastery over him for a while; but, worn out as he was by his long ride and by the nights and days passed in that horrible prison, and also by the tension of mind he had just gone through, the poor fellow at last let everything slip, and by degrees closed his eyes, and soon was in the land of oblivion; and even though he woke up from time to time, each waking was of shorter duration than the one before, till at last the feeling of anxiety that still lingered in his mind got blunted by degrees, and all his ideas became inextricably confused, and in the end vanished altogether. In short, not to make too long a story of it, the gallant soldier went fast asleep.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

WHILE in this state he dreamt he was at Lucca, and in a richly-furnished apartment, in company with Marco Visconti; but the Marco before him had a vacant face and staring glassy eyes. Lupo spoke to him, but received no answer; he held out to him Ermelinda's letter, but no hand was stretched out to take it. The dreamer then fancied that he offered to kiss Marco's hand, but though he did not see it drawn back, the hand was not where he imagined it to be, and eluded his grasp. What could it all mean? He must find some one to explain matters to him. But what strange change was happening now? The hangings, gilding, and ornaments of the room suddenly vanished; the walls, besides appearing quite bare, seemed to become dark, rough, and contracted. The gilded ceiling turned into a black and heavy vaulted roof, the pavement became a dunghill; a little straw was lying in a corner, and on the straw lay Marco Visconti, stretched at full length. Marco? Why, it was not Marco. He fancied the figure was suddenly transformed into Ottorino, saying to him, in a faint and timid voice—

"Is that you, Lupo?"

"It is."

"But I thought you were going to Lucca?"

"Yes, I am."

"And why do you not continue your journey? And how came you here? Ah, fly, fly—you are in danger."

Here a confused medley of whispering voices struck the sleeper's ear, and a light flashed across his eyes, which were still closed; and, as often happens in dreams that external impressions seem to fit in with, if not to produce the imaginings of the dreamer's mind, he fancied

that Ottorino, alarmed by this, continued to call out to him—"See, they are come to murder you—fly for your life!" He then made an attempt to rise—to speak—to draw his dagger, but, do what he would, he could not put one foot before the other; his voice seemed choked, and his arms dropped paralysed by his side.

He remained a few moments in this condition, when on awaking he found his throat tightly clutched, and a heavy weight on his body; he shook himself, and opening his eyes, found it was not a dream. The two ruffians of the previous evening were leaning on his chest: one was throttling him, while the other was trying to stab him with a dagger, while the host behind them, with a lantern in his hand, was crying out, "Hold him tight—take care he does not get up, and you, Passerino, strike him hard! run him through the heart."

"He has armour under his doublet, and the point won't act," answered the latter.

"Then let me finish him," said the landlord; "hold him down both of you"—and, laying down his lantern, he ran to fetch the bar of the door.

Lupo, after some fruitless efforts to escape from that powerful pressure, at last succeeded in rolling over, so that he and the two rogues were soon struggling together under the legs of one of the horses. The animal, terrified at the noise and confusion he heard beneath him, and gradually becoming infuriated, took to kicking and plunging so far as the halter would allow, and then began stamping first on one, then on another, of the three men thus entangled together, who were at last obliged to let each other go, and separate in order to get out of range of the horse's hoofs. The Limontese was the first to spring on his feet; out came his sword in the twinkling of an eye, and seeing the landlord before him, who had kept back all the time, partly from a prudent fear of the horse's heels, partly because, in that medley of heads, legs, and arms, he could not distinguish between friend and foe, he rushed at him and buried the weapon in his stomach with such force that he felt the hilt strike against his body.

"Take that, and that!" said Lupo, as he saw him fall to the ground streaming with blood; and then turned furiously on one of the other highwaymen, who having just at that moment extricated himself from the horse's legs, was coming at him, with a devilish grin of scorn and rage on his countenance, just such a grin as he had spent so much time in picturing to himself that night before he fell asleep. "Oh, it's you, is it?" cried out Lupo; "this is the way they murder Christians in these parts, I suppose?" and so saying, he gave the villain such a tremendous backhanded blow, that, in the first place he cut through the fellow's right hand, which, together with his dagger, he held aloft to try and parry the blow, and then ran him right through the cheek. The sanguinary monster remaining erect for an instant, clenched with a horrible grimace the two white rows of his teeth that were laid bare by the blow; he then reeled from side to side, clutching at the air with his remaining hand and the bloody stump of the other, like one bereft of his senses, and at last fell crossways against the wall, deluging it with his blood.

There now only remained the third assassin, and he, seeing how things were going, had tried to escape on all fours between the horses, and having succeeded in passing all but one, had now risen to his feet, and was edging round the back of this last to gain the door, when the beast, maddened by all the confusion, flung out behind so furiously that it would have gone ill with him if he had been caught. But strange to say, this very circumstance saved him; the horse, straining violently, broke his halter and escaped from the stable, and the man, seeing him pass close by, caught hold of his mane, leapt on his back and in a moment was away across the fields, as if a demon was behind him. Lupo, after having pursued him for a time, saw that it was lost labour and returned to the hostelry, watching to see that others did not come up in the meantime to give him a disagreeable reception. But the inn was solitary and out of the way, only inhabited by the landlord and his wife, despatched by him to spend that night with one of her gossips, so

as to manage this murderous plot in an easier manner; and therefore, notwithstanding all the noise, no living soul had appeared on the scene.

Lupo entered the yard, and came to the stable, where he only found the two he had left there; Lodrisio's squire was dead, but the landlord holding up his hand all dripping with blood, stretched it towards him, saying: "For mercy's sake—I have a burning thirst—you will find outside a tub full of water; bring me a sip, for I am at my last gasp."

Lupo went out, and returned at once with the water. The wounded man gulped it down with avidity, and then said: "How little I thought what would happen to-night, when I drew this at the well, to wash away the blood when they had murdered you!"

Our Limontese saddled his horse, and got on it; then the host, seeing he was going off, gasped out the following words: "Another act of charity, as you are a Christian! do not leave me to die in mortal sin. At the end of the road you will see a church steeple, pray send me the priest."

Lupo assured him he would not fail to do so; and, as he passed the curate's house, he knocked at the door, and hearing a window opened, he called out: "The landlord wants you—make haste to him, and take the holy oil with you!"

"What is the matter? What has happened, my good man?" shouted the priest after him, but the rider went on at a sharp trot without paying any attention.

On he went quite alone; from time to time he stretched his numbed and battered limbs; and as he felt on different parts of his body, the smarts of many slight skin wounds inflicted by the sharp point of the stiletto penetrating between the rings of his mail armour, he said: "How lucky it was I put on my good steel coat." After a time he felt a pain in his shoulders, which was most likely a scratch received when he was rolling with his two friends under the feet of the horse. And last of all he became aware of a graze he had on his temple from a stroke of the dagger, and which he had scarcely perceived

in the excitement of the struggle. He touched it with his hand, and said to himself: 'What a rascal that Lodrisio is to have a Christian's throat cut like a sheep! and one, too, who never did him any harm in his life. It must be his envy and hatred that has injured my master! And if so, no doubt Beatrice's abduction must be his arrangement also. Ah! I ought to have guessed something when I met him this morning, and I saw him scan me from head to foot, and then fix his eyes on his squire. And that horrid grin, fancy my seeing it on the face of that gallows bird, when he was coming at me like a mastiff to tear me in pieces. But I had the best of it after all. That was a fine stroke, I vow! and down the knave went. It's a lesson to let sleeping dogs lie."

By this time dawn was breaking, and some human beings began to appear on the road, and peasants with their tools on their backs on their way to reap. Lupo, cheered by the returning light of day, and the sight of the fields, and men and animals moving about in them, soon began to forget the perils of the past night, and the blows given and received: and he was travelling on with all his thoughts turned to Marco, and to the distance he had yet to traverse before reaching him, when all at once he heard a great disturbance in a vineyard on his left hand. "Stop him! hold him!" and other cries. He saw a number of country folk, all in a jumble together, pursuing a man on horseback, who was going at a furious pace across country. Only imagine that this was one of the worthies from the inn, the third who had escaped as by a miracle from our Limontese. The steed he was bestriding, a savage and uncontrollable stallion, had, as may be remembered, broken his halter, and now was careering desperately along, taking tremendous leaps, rushing through the rows of vines, breaking down the stakes, and destroying everything; and the shouts of the pursuing peasants seemed only to increase his speed and fury. Covered with dust and foam, his powerful flanks and chest stained with blood, panting and neighing, his ears down, his crest erect, and his tail raised; he snorted fiercely, and scattered in his mad

career stones and clods of earth all round him. The man on his back stuck on like grim death, holding the mane, and crying out, "Help! help!" Lupo recognised him at once, and stopped to see how the matter would end.

The horse went on in his course for some time, altering his direction according to the manner in which he was chased by the country-people; but at last, blinded by fright, he came with a great shock against the trunk of a large tree, and both he and his rider rolled on the ground. The animal had his neck broken, but the rider was quite unhurt, and sprang to his feet as lightly as a cat; but while he was shaking off the earth and sand with which he was daubed, he raised his eyes, and saw behind him the magician who had finished off his two companions in two blows, Lupo himself; who, having followed the horse's course, had arrived at the scene of the disaster.

Mercy on us! the man gave himself up for dead: he saw he had no chance of escaping on foot from one on horseback, and threw himself on his knees, begging for his life.

"Who are you, you scamp?" asked Lupo.

"Most noble sir," answered the poor wretch, shaking in every limb, "I am a poor devil: what I did, I did not do it out of treachery; it was only to get a little bread for my poor children, five little treasures I have at home; and it was Passerino who let me into the scrape."

"But what was his quarrel with me?"

"I know nothing about it."

"What, can't you tell me anything?"

"No, I know nothing; you can kill me, but I have nothing to tell. He came last night to my house, and said, 'Come and earn a gold florin,' but I know nothing else; and I do not even know who you are."

"Bravo! and you came off quietly to cut the throat of a perfect stranger?"

"You are quite right, and I only ask your mercy. You can do with me what you will, but I commend my

children to you. You may believe me, that hunger drove me to it. In these times of scarcity, I could not see them die before my eyes of starvation."

Lupo drew out of his pocket a gold florin, and throwing it on the ground, said, "This is not for you, you rascal, but for your children, and remember, if I had caught you half an hour ago, these reasons would not have saved your life; now be off, and return thanks to your patron saint."

So saying, he shook his reins, and went on with his journey, experiencing no more adventures worthy of being recorded.

On his arrival at Lucca, he saw a number of people dispersed in the streets making a great noise, and guessed this must be a rising of the inhabitants. As he went on, the crowd increased, as also did the confusion and disorder. Weapons of different sorts and scaling-ladders were being brandished aloft; and at times, amid the deep and sinister murmur of an excited multitude, might be distinguished the ringing of a bell, and some cries of agony, to which the populace replied by derisive howls.

"What has happened here?" asked Lupo of a boy, whom he saw leaving a house, with a spit in his hand, and betaking himself into the thick of the mob.

"Don't you know?" was the reply, "they are going to lay siege to the palace of the government; all hands to work! we must finish up those renegades!" And so saying, he was off in a moment.

"Lay siege to the palace of the Signoria?" said Lupo to himself. "If I am not mistaken, that is where they told me at Milan, was Marco's abode." And with his mind all astir with this news, he went on a little, intending to find out more about the matter. But then, he reflected, that to ask so openly about Marco, in the midst of a crowd of people, who apparently were in open revolt against him, could do no good to anyone; so calming his anxiety as well as he could, he retraced his steps to a hostelry which he remembered to have observed in passing.

On entering the house, he put up his horse in the stable, and then began, in a careless sort of way, to chatter a bit with the old landlady, who was the only person in the house—her husband and her two sons having gone out to join in the tumult; and, leading her on by degrees, as if it was no particular business of his, he set her tongue wagging glibly, and got out of her everything he wanted to know.

The state of affairs was as follows:—

Marco had been at Florence for some days; meanwhile, one of the commanders of the German troops, who had been left as his lieutenant at Lucca, had given the rein to the soldiery, who, for some time past impatient of constraint, had now run riot over the town as if it were their own property, plundering, imposing taxes, satisfying their feelings of revenge—in a word, committing all sorts of atrocities; and the townspeople, already infuriated by the suspicion that Visconti was intriguing to sell Lucca to the Republic of Florence, had risen in insurrection.

Lupo, who, at the first idea that Marco was in danger, had decided on one of two courses, either to rescue him or to perish in his behalf, felt much relieved when he heard that he was well away from these troubles. As there was now nothing more for him to do in Lucca, he at once resumed his journey to endeavour to find him in Florence; for he well knew how important it was that Ermelinda's letter should reach its destination as soon as possible, as on this might depend the lives of three persons who, in their different ways, were all precious to him. So he got on his horse, and off he went. The journey from Lucca to Florence is rather a long one, and we do not suppose our readers have any great desire to accompany him, so we will let him jog on at his ease, and changing the scene, will transfer ourselves to the Arno, where, till Lupo's arrival, we can occupy ourselves with Marco's proceedings.

CHAPTER XXIX.

SINCE the last letter written by Marco to Lodrisio, which the reader will remember he received from Pelagrua at the castle of Rosate, affairs at Lucca had persistently gone from bad to worse. The German troops, composed of needy unprincipled adventurers, utterly regardless of discipline, had conducted themselves in such a way that they could no longer be controlled by Visconti.

Marco, who had to contend every day with this disorderly rabble, owed the little hold over them he still possessed, to the lustre of his name, the dignity of his personal bearing, and to his readiness of speech; qualities which always fascinate the multitude, even in its own despite. Time after time his presence had been sufficient to make these turbulent troops lay aside their arms, which they were on the point of imbruing in the blood of his subjects. Time after time he had ordered these very rebels to arrest their ringleaders, and such was the awe inspired by the dignified severity of his countenance, that they had not once ventured to disobey.

At the same time he saw plainly enough by how slight a thread he upheld an authority disputed at the very first, and which had no intrinsic strength of its own. Now, his original title he could not alter, and whence was the intrinsic strength to come? You will say, it ought to be sought for among the citizens themselves, among the oppressed people of Lucca, who naturally ought to have the courage to unite, in order to shake off the scourge and plague of those fiends incarnate from their backs. But the difficulty lay with the citizens themselves, part of whom had never been able to look

favourably on Marco, part had lost what little love they ever had for him, and the rest had conceived a violent hatred against him. One man could not stand a master who was not a native of Lucca, another could not forgive his having made friends with the Guelphs; some urged one complaint, some another. But the main reason why he was so universally blamed was, that finding himself, as the saying is, between the anvil and the hammer, he had often winked at minor evils to avoid greater. For instance, he had more than once shut his eyes to abuses and encroachments on the part of those too powerful troops, and had not been sufficiently careful to hold an even balance in regard to the daily squabbles between them and the townspeople, so as to maintain the right of the weak against the tyranny of the strong. Not that Marco really loved injustice; but his notions of justice were, like those of most soldiers, of a rough and ready kind, that did not stand much upon ceremony, and besides, he had to keep up his own position. The end of it all was, that Marco felt he could not depend upon the citizens to assist him in making head against the partisans of Ceruglio. Besides, these citizens were all unarmed, and ignorant of military discipline, and, what was worst of all, were at feud amongst themselves, plebeians against nobles, and *vice versâ*, quarter against quarter, faction against faction; the upper classes complained of the lower, the lower of the higher; so you may suppose the Germans had it pretty much their own way with them.

This very insurrection, mentioned above, was confined to one quarter of the town, the rest not responding to the summons; and the handful of wretches who were making such a disturbance at the time Lupo entered the city, before he had gone five or six miles on his forward journey, were all shut up in their houses, speechless with terror, except twenty or so of them, who were lying on the pavement of the squares and streets, pierced with the German lances, or trodden to pieces by their horses' hoofs. These were the fine results they had obtained by this foolish attempt, save and

except, as may be supposed, a fresh squeeze and another turn of the halter, which was already round their necks.

So that I think we shall agree that Marco was in some respects to be pitied, if, in order to keep the strong quiet, he tried to ingratiate himself with the weak, and sometimes winked at infractions of justice for the sake of humanity.

At last, finding himself reduced to such straits, and perceiving that things were growing worse every day, and that the government of Lucca was slipping from his grasp, he determined to get rid of it in good time beforehand, on the best terms he could. So having come to an understanding with the leaders, or constables, as they were then called, of the German troops, he entered upon secret negotiations with the Republic of Florence, which had been striving for some time past to obtain from him the cession of the city of Lucca. The preliminaries of the bargain were already far advanced, and there remained only a few minor points to be settled, and this was the object, as was supposed, of Marco's visit to Florence.

The money that was to be paid for the proposed cession of Lucca, was to be employed partly in making up their arrears to the German troops, and the rest Marco seems to have intended to use in taking those very troops into his own pay, and leading them into Lombardy, to assist in carrying out the plan he and Lodrisio had been maturing for such a long time.

We must not, however, fancy that all went on smoothly. On the contrary, he was full of bitterness, disgust, and misgivings, on account of the endless unforeseen difficulties arising on all sides, owing to old grudges and enmities which now came to be displayed against him. At one time he was irritated by the nonchalant sluggishness of some strong partisan, at another he suspected that some friend would betray him; and just at that moment he was tormented by the news that the beast he wanted to sell, instead of letting itself be led quietly in a halter, had commenced kicking and butting with its

horns. To this was added a feeling of disgust, ill dissembled even from himself, and a secret shame at the bargain he was on the point of clenching; not to mention an incessant and excruciating undercurrent of remorse and passion, which seemed to pervade his whole mind, and to mingle itself with every other feeling.

The day preceding that on which the treaty for the acquisition of Lucca was to be laid before the Florentine Council, Marco, who had received an intimation that the "Priors, and other rulers of the land" would hear what he had to say before they proceeded to a discussion, was alone in his apartment, and had just finished picking out of a bundle of papers the various treaties entered into up to that day, between himself and the agents of the Republic, when a page entered to announce the arrival of a courier from Lombardy, who had passed through Lucca. "Let him come in at once," said Marco, thinking he was one of those despatched by Lodrisio every week.

The new arrival appeared. It was Lupo, who, nearly beside himself with joy and bewilderment at finding himself in the presence of this man, could not bring out a word, so merely took Ermelinda's letter from his bosom and presented it. Visconti put it down on a table without even glancing at the address, and asked, "Then you have come through Lucca?"

"Yes, I came across Lucca," answered Lupo, whose heart beat so fast that he could hardly speak, and he added, after having to a degree recovered his breath; "and I left it in a great commotion."

"By this time the town is as quiet as a convent," returned Marco, who had received three or four expresses to keep him informed of the revolt during its entire progress from beginning to end. "But I hope you received no injury there."

"Oh! no, indeed!" replied the youth, encouraged by the kind manner in which this question was asked. "And if anyone—I am not inclined by nature to bear insults patiently; and when I was on my way to Marco, I should like to see the person who would dare to harm me."

On hearing this boast Visconti raised his eyes to the speaker's face, scanning him for a moment from head to foot, and then bestowing a kindly smile upon him, said, "You are not one of the usual messengers—you have been a soldier, have you not?"

"I am one now."

"You see, I guessed right! I know our craft by their looks; and you have a countenance which agrees with your words, and assures me you are an honourable and honest fellow."

Lupo blushed scarlet with the pleasurable excitement caused by these praises; and Marco, walking up to him, continued: "You are very young; tell me what actions you have taken part in?"

"The first action I was in was the one on the Adda; I fought there under your banner, and afterwards——"

But Visconti, without letting him go on, took hold of his cheek between his fingers, and pinching it with military friendliness: "So you were one of those good blades who stuck so close to me through the year twenty-four. You learnt your trade pretty quick. We must be old friends in that case."

I can hardly describe the Limontese's emotion at feeling himself touched by that hand, and hearing such words from those lips. He felt as if he could walk on air. From the region of the cheek pressed between Marco's fingers there was diffused through his whole being a pleasant thrill—for admiration, like love, has its madness, its enthusiasm.

When Visconti withdrew his hand, he seized it and kissed it with the fervour of a devotee.

This warm and loyal impulse touched the heart of the generous leader, who, accustomed to live in camps, in the midst of war and dangers, took pleasure in nothing so much as the attachment of his soldiers; and this demonstration of feeling seemed all the more gratifying, as for a long time he had been far away from his own people; hence he exclaimed, much moved: "My good Milanese for ever!"

"Long live Marco! Long live our Captain!" cried Lupo. "Oh, when shall I see those days again, when I rushed to victory with your name on my lips!"

"Listen to me," said Visconti, lowering his voice; "those days may return, and perhaps at no great distance of time. When you go back into Lombardy you will say to your valiant comrades: 'Marco's heart has always been with you, and you must trust in your old leader.' As to yourself, attend to me; at whatever time or place, or in whatever condition I may be in, the first time that you chance to see me, come to me with confidence; remember what I have now told you, and you shall not be the loser."

While the boy was pouring forth thanks and protestations, Marco cut his words short by saying: "Why did you not make yourself known to me before?" And then going to the table he took up a pen, and said: "Soldier, your name?"

"Lupo, from Limonta."

"Lupo? that name I have heard before, it is not altogether strange to me."

"That may be, for you once condescended to write it down with your own glorious hand on a sheet of paper which saved my life."

Then Marco recalled the letter which, at Beatrice's entreaty, he had written to the Abbot of San Ambrogio, on that fatal night, which was indelibly inscribed in his memory. He remembered that the man for whom the favour had been asked was a squire of Ottorino's; so now he gazed with renewed attention on the face of the youth before him, and recognized him as the same who had served as squire to Ottorino on the day of the joust. Quite amazed at this discovery, he said to himself: "Why on earth did Lodrisio send me this man as a messenger—a retainer of his enemy?" and thought of questioning Lupo on the subject; but on second thoughts decided to examine instead the letter just arrived, in the belief that it was from Lodrisio, hoping to find in it the explanation of such a strange circumstance.

He took up the sheet of paper and opened it, and the

first thing that surprised him was to see it was in ordinary writing, and not in cipher; then, struck by the first sentence, he ran over the paper with his eyes to discover the signature. Who can describe his feelings at seeing Ermelinda's name! Fearing that his excitement might betray him into some undignified action, he at once dismissed Lupo, who left him, wondering as to the cause of the sudden change he could not help remarking, in the features and expression of the great man.

During the short time which Marco spent in locking and bolting the door, a hundred speculations filled his mind: "Is it possible that Beatrice has ceased to care for Ottorino,—and would be willing—oh, I must be in my dotage to hope so. It is more likely to beg me to cease opposing this match. Perhaps it is to announce to me that she is already married, that all is over! It would be a crushing blow, and yet I feel that I could bear it—yes, bear it, and even offer these much-tried people every amends in my power, and oblige them to forgive me."

He sat down with the letter in his hand, and read:

"Marco,—A disconsolate mother throws herself at your feet, and bathing your proud hand with bitter tears, conjures you, by all you hold sacred in heaven and earth, to give her back her only daughter, the supreme joy, the last comfort of her unhappy life. I know that the great ones of this earth are oft times used to surround their lives with mystery, to conceal their actions, and after committing an injustice, in order to appear irresponsible, to make a show of irritation with even the complaints of the victim who has suffered. But you—you have a soul made for pity; you have known in past times what sorrow is, and will not refuse the prayers of a poor afflicted woman.

"Marco, my daughter has been stolen from me—for more than twenty days she has been in the power of others. Who can tell where she may be, or into whose hands she has fallen? It is to you that I confidently appeal to restore her at once unharmed to her desolate parents, to her husband, who has been betrayed and

violently torn from her. It is her own mother who claims her from you, in the name of all who love her, in the name of God, I implore you, kneeling humbly before you, with my head in the dust, with my spirit dismayed and trembling, but inspired at the same time with the confidence that is given me by the certainty that my words are heard in heaven, and that even for the powerful there is a punishment in store.

"Oh, Marco, forgive me! I will but weep and pray—all my words shall be lowly and humble—forgive a poor mother who is made frantic by excess of grief. Oh, if I knew how to touch your heart! See, I have already told you she is the wife of Ottorino. Yes, he has put the ring on her finger; their union is blessed before God. I was foremost in hastening this marriage, and must I own why? Can I without confusion, without shame? You yourself will believe me when I say that I acted thus, partly from the affection I had for you.

"I swear to you that I wished your welfare in this, that I felt sure it was the only means of diverting your mind from an ill-omened house, out of which nothing but disasters have ever come upon you. Because, you see, if even—if ever I could have forgotten myself so much as to give my daughter for your bride, Beatrice could never have been yours, for her young heart was already bestowed on another. Marco! I knew you well formerly, and I know that you would not then have desired a body without a soul; that you could not have found your happiness in the misery of the lady of your love. Now, tell me if Beatrice's mother has been mistaken in judging of you as Ermelinda once judged.

"Do you still remember that unhappy name? It is all that is left to me of what I was—time and grief have destroyed the rest. You—how much glory you have won! Powerful, revered, and dreaded by your enemies! The pride and the idol of Lombardy! But I—I have nothing but my daughter, that sweet and cherished treasure of my life; my only comfort and hope; all my pride is centred in her alone. Ah! by your courtesy—by your world-wide fame—by what passed once between

us—if I was ever beloved by you, deliver me from this agony; restore my daughter to me; restore her now, before grief has closed for ever these eyes weary of weeping. Oh, if you knew the anguish of my days! If you could experience the horrors of one single hour of my long nights, haunted by ghostly fears! If you knew what it is to be a mother! My life, as you know, has always been thickly sown with sorrows; but all the past is a shadow, a dream, to the torment and agony which this mortal blow causes me. No! I did not believe it was possible to suffer so much in this world. Oh, God! merciful God! Your hand is laid too heavily on a feeble human being, cease this chastening which I can no longer support; take me into your good keeping, but first save my daughter! Alas! tears cloud my vision, my hand shakes; I feel I can do no more. Marco! would I were able to fall at your feet and expire there, while asking with my last voice that favour which you could not deny to a dying soul!

"Have pity, have pity on the miserable

"ERMELINDA."

CHAPTER XXX.

THIS letter sent a dagger through Marco's heart; he proposed to mount at once and ride straight away to Milan, and he was with difficulty restrained by the remembrance of the affairs of Lucca, and the treaty that was to be settled the next day. He spent all that night as if lying on thorns, without closing his eyes, pierced and tortured as he was by ten thousand pangs of terror and remorse, coupled with a frantic impatience that nearly drove him mad. He leapt from his couch, rushed to the balcony to look out and see if it were yet the daylight, so longed for and yet so much dreaded. Then, after striding rapidly up and down the chamber, he again threw himself on his bed, where he tossed and rolled from side to side, without obtaining a moment's peace or repose.

At last it was day; the appointed hour struck, and he presented himself before the Priors; his face was haggard, his eyes started out of his head; he spoke but little, and his utterance was thick and confused, impatient of the slightest contradiction; he disputed everything that was said or done, and seemed as if he wanted to pick a quarrel with everybody. In short, he so overstepped the boundaries of discretion and common civility, that the small minority who had always been against the purchase had no difficulty now in bringing over the majority to their side, which was done the more readily as it was clear that no trust could be placed in the professions or good faith of a person so whimsical, haughty, and discourteous; in fact, it really was a question whether he were not almost, if not quite, out of his mind. It was, therefore, decided to give up Lucca altogether, and break off at once all

negotiations relating thereto. Marco, who had withdrawn from the Council Chamber during these deliberations, no sooner heard what had been decided upon, than, without saying a word to the German leaders, who had come with him to Florence on account of all this business, or showing surprise or anger at so unexpected a rebuff, he returned to his palace, and, accompanied by Lupo and two attendants, mounted his horse, and set off on his return to Lombardy, before any one knew anything at all about it.

By the aid of frequent relays of horses he travelled night and day, and on the way he made Lupo tell him all he knew about Beatrice and his master Ottorino.

Ermelinda had gone into no particulars in her letter, as she felt sure that Marco held the threads of the whole plot in his hands, and therefore supposed that he must know far more about the affair than she could possibly have told him in the compass of a letter.

Visconti, however, being quite in the dark about it all, on hearing now for the first time of the disappearance of Beatrice and her maid, of the trap in which the speaker himself had been caught together with his master, and of the danger he had since run, on his journey to Lucca, and on thinking over the events of the past year, could not help remembering what mortal aversion Lodrisio had always shown towards Ottorino. He then remembered a certain offer that had been made to him through Pelagrua to rid him of that young knight, and of certain malicious expressions and insinuations directed against him either by Pelagrua himself or by some agent on his behalf, and on comparing the dates, the event itself, and the character of the parties, he found such a remarkable coincidence that he felt persuaded that the whole assassination scheme had been concocted by those two dissemblers, who had been for some time, to his certain knowledge, on the most intimate terms with each other. Having arrived at this conclusion, he felt the blood boil in his veins, and his cheeks flush scarlet; he swore in his rage to revenge himself on those traitors for seeking to bring such in-

famy on his head; and to punish them for the agony they had caused the poor mother and her unfortunate daughter, and indeed not to rest so long as either of those rascals still lived; and absorbed as he was in these visions of revenge and fury, he spurred his palfrey and continued his journey at full gallop.

Arriving at Milan at last, after a rough and hasty journey, he sent his two grooms with the horses to his palace, while he himself and Lupo made the best of their way to the house of Count del Balzo, determined by some means to have an interview with Ermelinda, and to find out all she knew of the whereabouts of the missing pair, with a view to taking immediate steps for their rescue. He wished at the same time to clear himself to her of the charge of being mixed up in such a piece of treachery; for he could not endure the notion of being branded with such infamy in the mind of the woman whom he formerly loved more than life itself, and still reverenced more than any other being in the world.

It was midnight and pitch dark when Lupo knocked at the door of the Count's palace, and Marco drew down his visor, to avoid being recognized by the lacqueys. On entering, a deep silence reigned in the house, and Lupo guided Visconti through a succession of apartments into a little out-of-the-way room, where he left him with a lighted candle, saying he was going to awaken one of Ermelinda's female servants, to bid her inform her mistress of Marco's arrival, and that he wanted to speak to her at once.

Marco then unfastened his helmet, laid it on the table, and threw himself into an armchair to await Ermelinda's coming. He had not seen her for five-and-twenty years. How their respective circumstances had changed in that time! How different was she whom he then left to her whom he now was to see! How could he sustain her looks, certain as she was to taunt him with having caused her father's death, and her own present misery, after the love she had lavished upon him. The slightest sound he heard, the faintest shadow of anything moving

that he saw, made him exclaim, "Here she is," and a cold shudder ran through his frame.

But he had not long to wait; he suddenly saw a door in front of him open very gently, and a lady glide in, clad in a loose white garment, with her hair in a partly dishevelled state. Her face was tinged with a slight flush, which clearly had been called forth by some extraordinary agitation, and concealed for a moment its ordinary pallid hue, all the more visible by contrast with that temporary colouring. Her eyes, swelled and reddened by her long vigils and weeping, glistened with a slight ray of hope, mingled, however, with an ill-concealed look of apprehension.

Visconti at first scarcely recognized Ermelinda, so sadly had age and suffering altered her from what she once was; but, however much he might feel certain from seeing her in that place, and in such distress, that she could be none other than the mother of Beatrice, yet he could not bring himself to address her, and remained for a moment in suspense; when the lady, coming close up to him, gently extending her arms, and fixing her eyes on the ground, exclaimed, "Is it you?"

It was the same sweet-sounding accents, the same celestial harmony that he had so often drunk in in his youth. He jumped up as if he were giddy, fixed his astonished eyes in a frightened manner on the lady's countenance, scanning her, and in that first moment of frenzy, almost hoping still to find in her the beauty and that enchanting ray of love that was the light of his life for so many years, and the memory of which alone in his maturer years had produced his mad love for Beatrice; but soon recovering himself, he cast down his eyes, and remained sorrowfully standing there, without uttering a word.

"And is it you yourself?" said Ermelinda in a sweet though melancholy tone; "and have you come in person to restore me to life? The Lord will reward you for this act of mercy. I have been telling myself that when Marco is fully aware of the grief he has caused, he is too good and generous not to endeavour to undo it."

Marco, on hearing these words, was seized with so much tender pity for the unfortunate lady, and by such wrath against himself, that he could not restrain a gesture of annoyance, which at first greatly alarmed his companion.

"Do you call me good and generous?" he said in a half-stifled voice. "For mercy sake, Ermelinda, cease such cruel satire. I am in truth a miserable wretch, but I have not so entirely hardened my heart as not to know my own sins, and to feel a comfort in confessing them, and in confessing them to you in particular."

"No, do not speak in this way. God will pardon you—I have already forgiven you. The consolation you now afford me makes up to me for the anguish I have endured. Now, tell me, where is my daughter? When shall I see her again?"

"Have you not had any clue to her whereabouts from the jester, who was on her track?" asked Marco anxiously.

At these words the lady changed countenance; a sudden cloud darkened her brow, which had begun to wear an air of hope. She looked at Visconti, and replied with hesitation, "The jester, you say?—no, he has never appeared again, and I begin to be afraid. But you—why do you ask me?"—and she stopped short.

"I see, Ermelinda," pursued Visconti, "that you think it is I who am the cause of Beatrice's disappearance; but this is not the case. You must know——"

"Oh, my God! where is she then? Forgive me, Marco; it is not that I doubt your word, but did you not almost own to me this deed yourself, just now? And, you see, I have already known for some time, your feelings towards my poor child."

"Listen to me," said Visconti, bending down his head, in the attitude of a man conscious of guilt, and beginning his speech in a slow, faint voice, which became agitated and excited as he went on. "Listen to me, Ermelinda. It is true that I did love your daughter—I loved her with an overwhelming love. It was the impress of your image in her face, it was your soul that

I fancied was transfused into hers, which fascinated me, and took away my senses. If I had only been able to lay a crown at her feet! to make her my wife and my queen! There was one moment when I tasted the divine sweetness of hope, and that moment was my destruction; an insidious poison ran through my veins, and filled my whole being. When I felt certain that the maiden had already listened to the vows of another, it was too late, the wound had become incurable. I will not describe to you the long and intricate path of suffering by which I was urged at last to plan the death of my faithful follower, my dearest and most generous relation. I tremble even now when I think I was within an ace of imbruing in his blood this very hand, which he had pressed so often with the tender and respectful affection of a son."

"Are you speaking of Ottorino?"

"Yes, the unknown knight who fought with him to the death on the day of the joust, was that madman who stands before you."

The lady raised her eyes compassionately to Visconti's face, and apparently was on the point of saying something; but he continued in the heat of an ever-growing remorse:

"No, you must first hear the whole story, you must know that at that time I was obliged to leave these parts; well, when I went, I left behind an iniquitous command. I left strict orders with a low ruffian to put a stop to the marriage between the young fellow and your daughter; my gold in the hands of that wretch, bribed a treacherous servant of your own. I repeat to you, Ermelinda, I did not order the abduction of Beatrice, and I had not the remotest idea of such a project, but the villain, on whom I imposed that infamous duty, may have had the courage to imagine this enormity; in any case I am an impious wretch."

"No, no, Marco! for my sake cease this strong language; you are accusing yourself too heavily, for he cannot be altogether impious who feels so repentant for his fault. Stormy passions may have driven you out of

the right path, but Marco's own heart, I feel sure—I have no doubt of it, was never really perverted."

"Oh, my consoling angel!"—broke in Marco, much affected—"your words are a true balsam to me, Ermelinda! If you had been always at my side, my beacon and tender companion in the hard and stormy path of life, my days would have been calm and innocent, filled with the holy joys of a husband and father; and, when declining age arrives, the past would not be so heavy and sad with troublous recollections. You do not think me altogether bad! I thank you, Ermelinda; as you tell me so, I will believe also that I could not have entirely corrupted a heart which once burned with the fire lighted by your angelic character, by your immortal virtues. Yes, Ermelinda, I will believe, on your assurance, that I am yet more unhappy than criminal."

The lady hid her face in her hands, and began to weep.

"I am now here entirely for your sake," continued Marco, with increasing agitation; "to see if my blood can make any amends, for I am ready and willing to shed it to the last drop. I will search for Beatrice to restore her to you, to make her happy in her wished-for nuptials. I will find Ottorino also, and it behoves me to trace him out, and to give him back myself the bride whose possession I have disputed with him; I say it behoves me, and I am resolved to afford him this great joy as an atonement for all the misery I have caused him to suffer, as an amends for my long ingratitude for so much love and fidelity. I shall have not a moment's peace till I see you all happy again, and till I have cleared up this mystery of iniquity."

At this point he stopped for a moment and fixed his eyes on Ermelinda, who had never ceased weeping; and then pressing his clenched hands together, he continued with violence: "And let the villains tremble who have to answer to me for having caused so many tears. Woe, woe to them all! Ermelinda, I tell you, if I had to tear them one by one from the altar, I swear to you by hell——"

"No, Marco," interrupted the pious lady, raising her face full of a resolute though timid dignity; "do not suffer blasphemy to be uttered by Christian lips. How can you hope that God will bless the work of mercy that you propose to yourself, if you undertake it with vengeance in your heart? And what trust do you think I can repose in the deeds of a man who has not God with him?"

"You are an angel!" exclaimed Visconti; "and I —I am only a miserable wretch. Now, I must be gone; before dawn I shall be at my castle of Rosate. To-morrow's sun will see you happier. Farewell!"

"Farewell," replied Ermelinda; "may God be with you now and ever, and may He show mercy to us all. Farewell!" And as she saw him depart, as if now that the necessity had ceased, her mind was unable longer to sustain the effort it had made up to that moment to curb its emotion; all of a sudden she felt so faint that she was obliged to sink on a couch, whence she languidly listened to the sound of his steps, which, as he passed through the long galleries, became every instant fainter and fainter. When she could hear no more, she rose to her feet and tottered to her apartments; but, exhausted as she was by the emotion she had undergone, it appeared to her as if the whole affair had been but a dream.

Visconti, as he went out, found Lupo waiting for him under the portico, and said to him, "Come with me to Rosate."

The Limontese, having expressed his gratitude for the invitation by a respectful bow, followed him without a word. They both passed through the gate, and hastened across a large portion of the town in the dark, the one in front and the other behind, in profound silence, till having arrived at Marco's house they mounted their horses and galloped off to Rosate.

But another man, unknown to them, was galloping off a little in advance of them on the same road; this was a courier sent off at full speed to Pelagrua by Lodrisio, who had suddenly heard of the arrival of Marco at Milan.

Our two travellers arrived before the walls of the Castle of Rosate about daybreak. Marco gave the accustomed signal, when the drawbridge was lowered, the gates thrown open, and he passed with Lupo beneath the barbican; but neither there, nor in the courtyard beyond, was a living soul to be seen.

The porter, soon recognizing the lord of the castle, was running off to ring a bell to announce his arrival, but was stopped by a sign from him, and was at once questioned about Pelagrua.

"He went out this very night," replied the porter, "and he has not yet returned; but," he added, "a courier from Milan arrived an hour ago with a letter for him, which was understood to be of urgent importance."

"Where is the courier?"

"In my lodge here, and swearing like a heretic at the delay."

"Send him at once to me, in the red room. If Pelagrua should return in the meantime, let him in, but let no one go out afterwards without my orders. Do you understand?"

"What, not even the seneschal, after his return?"

"No, no one whatever."

"Sir, your commands shall be obeyed to the letter."

Marco, crossing a large courtyard, went into the room he had pointed out, in order to wait for the courier. A few minutes afterwards the man appeared, and Marco, meeting him, grasped him by the arm, and said, "Hand me that letter."

The worthy man, who in the dim light of the chamber did not recognize at first who it was who was speaking to him and treating him in that fashion, struggled to free his arm from Marco's clutch, and having at last extricated himself, answered, "My orders are, not to give it up, except into the seneschal's own hands."

Visconti, however, grasping him again still more firmly, drew him near a window, and replied with a terrible voice, "Hand me that letter."

By the light that came from the window, the poor man recognized the features of the famous captain, and

with pale face and trembling voice, he replied, "Forgive me, I did not know you. My master certainly—but you, you are the master—here, here is the letter," and he drew it from his breast, and gave it to him.

Marco opened it, and glancing eagerly over it, saw that it had no signature. He then read the contents, which were as follows:—

"You unhung scoundrel,—by this time you ought to have done the deed as we arranged the other day. Deuce take you for having delayed so long. A pretty mess you have got into, now that Marco is in Milan. Yes, I can tell you he arrived here to-night, and to-morrow he will be down upon you. Look sharp, you scoundrel. I hope this letter will put you on your mettle. Destroy every trace of the deed—remove every proof of it—look out in all directions; remember, you wretch, that your life depends on it."

Visconti was struck with horror. His hair stood on end, and a cold shudder ran through his veins. He went up to the courier and shaking his fist in his face, shouted to him, "Who gave you this letter?"

The question was spoken in a voice that admitted of no hesitating answer. So the man, throwing all thought of caution to the winds, replied at once, "I had it from Lodrisio."

"If you wish to leave this place alive," continued Marco, "tell me what sort of dealings has he with my seneschal?"

But the other, half stupefied by fear, looked at his questioner's face with staring eyes, and answered not a word.

"Do you know?" inquired Marco, in a still louder voice, "do you know anything of the contents of the letter which you have brought here?"

The courier in his fright and bewilderment could not utter a word.

"Do you know, you cowardly rogue?" cried the lord of the castle furiously, shaking him violently by the shoulder.

"Mercy, mercy!" he replied at last, as if waking up

from his stupor of alarm; "I know nothing. I have simply obeyed my master, who said to me, 'Carry this letter to Pelagrua,' and I have brought it. As for the rest, I swear to you on the faith of a Christian, that I am perfectly ignorant. You may kill me, but you will get nothing out of me, for I know nothing."

"I will speak to you again presently. In the meantime beware of quitting this room for a moment."

So saying Marco hastened to the seneschal's quarters, knocked, and on a maid-servant opening the door, told her that he wished to speak at once to Pelagrua's wife.

The maid, without knowing who he was, introduced him into a room, where, in a few moments, the seneschal's wife joined him with a child in her arms.

"Where is your husband?" asked Visconti in a stern, deep voice, as soon as he saw her.

The poor woman, alarmed at so suddenly finding herself in her master's presence, and at hearing herself questioned in this manner, stepped back, clasping the infant to her bosom, and replied, stammering, "He went out last night, but I do not know where."

"Read this letter," said Marco, giving her Lodrisio's missive, "and explain to me at once the mystery which it implies."

The woman glanced over the fatal paper in fear and trembling, then falling on her knees before her lord, said, amid a torrent of tears, "Oh, have pity on my wretched husband!"

"Quick, tell me, what do those words mean," interrupted Marco.

"I will tell you all I know."

"Get up and speak at once."

The poor frightened creature rose to her feet, and sobbing and shaking, began: "I told him so often, I begged and entreated him. God will bear me witness——"

"I ask about Beatrice!" broke in Marco between his set teeth. "Tell me of her; is she still alive?"

"She is alive; she has been here more than a month," replied the woman.

"Alive and here?" repeated Visconti, breathing again.

"Yes," continued the seneschal's wife, "yesterday before dark I saw her attendant at a window, from which she often used to let me know by signs how things went on, and what her mistress was in need of; she let me know she was fairly calm; the poor thing has been ill for a time."

"Quick! take me to her directly, I must see her this moment, I tell you."

The woman put her infant into the arms of the handmaid, and said to Marco, "Come with me."

They went down a staircase, turned to the left under the portico, from thence they entered a courtyard, which they crossed, and found themselves in a long dark passage, whence, after many turnings and windings, they finally came out in another small and solitary court, where the woman, raising her hand towards some windows high up in an opposite wall, said, "She is there, in company with her faithful waiting-maid, who was brought here with her."

"We must go up immediately," said Marco, and was putting his foot on the first step of a staircase which led up to the room; but suddenly stopping short, he remained a moment in thought, and then said: "No, you shall go up alone, I will stay here; for the sight of a man—the sight of me—cheer her up, tell her to be of good courage, that she will see her mother very soon—and return home. Tell her that I—no, no, do not speak of me, do not mention my name; tell her everything to make her happy, and promise everything she wishes."

"But you have really and truly come to deliver her?" asked the seneschal's wife timidly—"for I could not have the heart to betray the poor creature."

"Let me die excommunicated, and let my body lie in unconsecrated ground, if I do not speak the truth."

"Then God bless you," exclaimed the woman, clasping her hands.

"And now," continued Visconti, "in order to gain time, while you are breaking the good news to her, I will go at once and despatch a messenger to her parents,

who will be here very soon." Upon this, he retraced his steps into the principal courtyard, where he found Lupo, and charged him to take the best horse out of the stables, and repair to Milan with what haste he could, to announce to the Count and Countess del Balzo that their daughter was discovered, and to beg them to come immediately to Rosate to see her, and take her home.

While Marco was engaged on this errand, Pelagrua's wife went up the staircase, and entered a gallery, where, approaching a door through which was the entrance into Beatrice's apartments, she knocked lightly, speaking at the same time. No one answered; she put her ear to the keyhole, and did not hear a sound in the room; she knocked louder, called Lauretta, called Beatrice, nobody replied; she went to a large window, defended by an iron grating which looked into the second room, rapped with her fingers against the glass, looked in, called the waiting-maid and the mistress again and again, but with no result; she now returned to the door, knocked, shook it, battered it; but all was in vain.

The poor thing felt a deathly chill come over her. What could have happened to the prisoners? She thought of Lodrisio's letter, and shuddered. She thought of Marco, and would have preferred to fall dead on the spot, rather than appear before him with this news. What was she to do? Hide herself? Escape? but where, and how? Visconti, if he did not soon see her re-appear, would fasten his suspicions on her also, and then if her husband returned in the meantime? She raised her eyes to heaven, ejaculated: "Lord! I am in Thy hands;" and then, with the pious resignation of a good soul, she betook herself to the room where she knew Marco was generally to be found when he came to the castle.

She had just entered the ante-room, when she saw him coming from the portico, returning from having despatched Lupo to Milan. Directly he perceived her, he hastened his steps to join her, and as soon as he was near enough to be heard, without speaking too loud, "Well," he asked, anxiously—"have you comforted her? Did

you tell her her mother would be here in a few hours? How is she? What did she say?"

The woman, instead of replying, covered her face with both her hands, and burst into tears.

"Oh, my God!" cried Marco, his expression changing suddenly from tender anxiety to fear and horror. "What has happened? Tell me this moment—tell me for your life's sake;" and he caught hold of one of her hands.

"She is not to be found," answered the seneschal's wife, in a voice stifled, and broken by sobs; "there is no one in her rooms."

"Wretches that you are! Infamous traitors, the whole set of you!" Marco cried out, like a madman. "But, thank God, you are in my power! Villains, yes, you are in my power, and blood shall be redeemed by blood."

While he spoke he struck his forehead with one hand, and with the other grasped as in a vice that of the woman, who, thinking her last hour on earth was come, raised her eyes to heaven with a look of such timid piety, that even a harder heart would have been moved to compassion.

Visconti was touched, let go her hand, and looked her in the face, while she, lifting up to heaven the hand which still bore the marks of his iron pressure, said, still weeping: "God is my witness; I am innocent!"

"And I believe you," said Marco; "good woman, take courage, you have nothing more to fear from me." But seeing that she continued to cry, he resumed in a more decided and impatient manner. "Be comforted, I say, and tell me quietly all you know."

The woman somewhat cheered, but still frightened, told of the door which she had found closed, and how she had knocked and called in vain outside. Visconti felt a slight hope that Beatrice might still be in her rooms, and that for some good reason she would neither open the door nor answer. He then remembered the other secret door which opened into the same apartment, the very one by which Lodrisio and Pelagrua had entered

some days before, to the great consternation of the poor prisoners. He therefore proposed to the seneschal's wife to let her in on that side, and took her there himself by roundabout and secret passages, and telling her he would wait for her outside, pulled a cord connected with some springs that disclosed the door.

The woman entered, and pushing back the panel, so as to conceal Marco from any person inside, cast her eyes round the room, which was Beatrice's ordinary sleeping room, but saw no one ; then she passed through three or four more in succession, calling out and inquiring as she went, but with no better success. It may well be conceived what a state poor Marco was in all this time.

In a few minutes the woman returned to the door behind which she had left him, and said in a low voice, "There is no one."

He now came forward, and looked round the room with a diffidence and consternation scarcely to be imagined. He was treading that floor so often pressed by Beatrice's feet ; his hand rested on the furniture that she had handled ; he breathed the air she had breathed ; in fact her presence seemed to brood over everything. Every moment he thought he heard her sigh, and the faint sounds of her voice issuing from some secret hiding place, seemed to appeal to him for pity and assistance.

Hard by the partition where the door opened, was a splendid bed with embroidered curtains, which had not been slept in, as the sheets were neatly turned back, and the surface of the bed was unruffled, save that one side preserved the impression of some person having leant against it. Beatrice had never dared to get into bed or lie down, ever since she discovered she was no longer secure, even in the privacy of her apartments, but had spent each night, ill as she was, without taking off her clothes, reclining in an armchair, leaning her feeble frame against the bed, and languidly supporting her head on her elbow.

On a small table, in the centre of the room, was a

lamp still alight, but which, its oil being almost spent, only sent up a thin thread of flame along a wick all but reduced to a white ash. Marco fixed his eyes upon it, and in that moment of excitement, yielding to the fancies peculiar to that age, so prone to omens and empty auguries, imagined that that slender flamelet was an image, or so to speak, a symbol of Beatrice's life, and under the influence of a superstitious terror, drew the seneschal's wife gently away, for fear by agitating the air she might put it out.

Near the lamp lay a Bible open at the thirty-fourth chapter of Jeremiah; the leaves seemed bathed with fresh tears, and at the third, fourth, and fifth verses, the following words had been underscored:[1] "Non effugies de manu ejus, sed in comprehensione capieris—Attamen audi verbum Domini—Hæc dicit Dominus ad te. Non morieris in gladio—sed in pace morieris; et vae Domine! plangent te."

Marco, on reading this, seemed to feel an almost supernatural certainty that he should find the unhappy maiden still alive. Those words of the prophet that she had underlined, and from which she must have derived consolation, seemed to his excited imagination a clear prediction as to her fate; so he turned to the woman and said, "Be of good cheer, for I am sure Beatrice is not dead."

The wife of the seneschal looked him in the face, and without daring to ask what warrant he had for the confidence he expressed, not only by his words but even more by his looks, followed him into the second room, which he entered still pursuing his researches. Here they found evident marks of violence and of desperate resistance. They saw a small table overturned, and fragments of vases and cups on the floor that must have been upon it. The bed was all in confusion, the bed-

[1] "And thou shalt not escape out of his hand, but shalt surely be taken, and delivered into his hand: . . . . yet hear the word of the Lord. . . . . Thus saith the Lord of thee, Thou shalt not die by the sword, but thou shalt die in peace . . . . and they will lament thee, saying, Ah, lord!"

clothes pulled off and thrown on the floor; one of the curtains torn from top to bottom; the head of the bed wrenched from the wall and twisted on one side; and they saw that the waiting-maid, in resisting her assailants, had clung to one of the pillars of the tester, and had been torn from it by main force.

Marco, having observed all in silence, passed through a third and fourth apartment, till he came to the door opening into the corridor, shook it, and finding it was barred on the inside, inferred that the prisoners had not been carried off through it, but through the secret door mentioned above; so he and his companion retraced their steps through the rooms, and went out by the same way through which they had come in. It so happened, however, that in a certain dark passage the woman's foot came in contact with a soft flimsy substance, which, on bringing it to the light, she saw was a veil, all rumpled and crushed; this was a fresh argument in favour of Visconti's opinion, that the girl had passed in that direction. But to resume our story.

This passage, after conducting them through other long and tortuous corridors, came out at last, after endless windings, into an unused little court full of nettles and weeds, which was reached by a corkscrew staircase. In this courtyard there were two doors. One, opening into a vaulted passage, which crossed an immense glacis and a thick wall, and then led to the outside of the castle under a portcullis and over a drawbridge of its own, was a postern gate; the other was lower down, entirely made of iron, closed with great heavy bolts and bars, and almost concealed between two enormous barbicans built of dark coloured stone. This opened upon the interior of the fortress, and gave access to an infinity of subterranean passages, underground rooms and casemates, through an endless labyrinth of intricate lanes and passages mixed and interlaced in a hundred directions, and burrowing through the whole of the basement of the enormous edifice.

Marco, having sent for the feudal judge of his Seigneury, who acted in his name in the castle and its

dependencies, ordered him to interrogate a family who lived in one of the bastions not far from the above-mentioned courtyard. He made out that one night there had been heard by them certain stifled cries and groans. Not being able to make out whether the prisoners had been carried out through the postern or concealed in the basement of the castle, Marco ordered the doors of the subterranean passages to be forced as the keys were not forthcoming, and at the same time he sent out some discreet persons to scour the country and get what information they could, with express directions not to make Pelagrua suspect they were in search of him, but if they should find him, to bring him back to the castle, if necessary, by main force.

The party that were ordered to search the interior of the castle, after breaking down the door with levers and crowbars, found themselves in a dark passage, whence they severally went off in different directions. Each party, however, met with new obstacles at every step. The entrance to every corridor was closed with thick iron bars, and every room on either side was blocked with massive furniture and heavy iron chests. Marco himself flew here and there, inspiriting the workers, and lending a hand at smashing doors and breaking open hinges and bars—but all in vain. After forcing their way through passage after passage, door after door, and searching endless empty rooms, they still found endless passages yet to be traversed, endless rooms to be searched.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THIS tedious labour having gone on for some hours, one of the men thought he heard a distant voice, as if from underground. Marco at once ordered every one to be silent, and they listened with all their ears. A little while after the voice was heard again; it was a prolonged, shrill cry, as of grief, which seemed to come from a vault beneath the basement of one of the towers. All immediately set to work again, spurred on by these fresh hopes. In an instant a barrier was broken down, and a door beaten in. Marco went in first to a small room with a taper in his hand, lifted a trap-door on a level with the floor, and went down a winding staircase to the bottom of the tower in question. He was going forward in fear and trembling through a large dark dungeon, when he heard a voice asking for mercy, and discerned in a corner, close to the wall before him, something like a ghost stretching out its arms towards him. On hastening in that direction he distinguished an unknown face, by the light of the lamp he bore.

"It is certainly not Beatrice, it's a man," he cried. It was no other than Tremacoldo.

The jester soon told them who he was, and how, having ventured into the castle to find out if the Count del Balzo's daughter was concealed there, he had been caught and thrown into that dungeon, whence he never expected to come out alive. But he had no news to tell about Beatrice.

The bonds were broken and the prisoner soon set at liberty, and Marco, more discouraged than ever, gave orders for the search to continue. After a time a squire appeared, to announce the arrival at the castle of the Count and Countess del Balzo, who were asking eagerly

for the master. On hearing this, Marco grew pale, took a few steps towards the door, as if on his way to meet his newly arrived guests, but then turned back, and with his head sunk on his breast and his arms hanging at his side, he remained for some time leaning against a pillar without moving or speaking.

At last, from a spot at some distance from where Marco was standing, there was a cry raised by many voices at the same time: "She is here! she is found! found!" All who were there, flinging down their tools, responded with another joyful cry, and rushed off in that direction. The light of a number of waving torches illuminated the dark, vaulted roof of the intricate labyrinth.

"Is she alive?" Marco's voice was heard asking, in the middle of the excited crowd.

"She is dead," replied a voice from the place to which all were hastening.

And then a group of persons was seen coming forward; in the centre were two squires carrying reverently in their arms the Count's daughter, whose face was ashy white, her eyes shut, and her head hanging over one shoulder. Lauretta followed her all dishevelled, supporting her mistress's head, continually kissing her, and bathing her with her tears.

Marco, in whose heart these varying cries of hope and despair were still resounding, when he saw this funereal procession advancing slowly, and by the light of the torches recognized the lovely form and white face of their youthful burden, could not believe it was a real spectacle; he tried to hope that he was under the fanciful illusion of a dream. In order to make sure that he was awake, he stretched out his hands and felt the walls, and the persons of those who passed him; at last, cleaving the crowd, who made way for him, he approached Beatrice, and laid his hand on her brow.

The cold thrill that touch sent through him, roused him from the state of stupefaction into which he had fallen. His limbs trembled violently, the blood rushed to his face and swelled the veins of his forehead, from

which the sweat was seen to fall in heavy drops to the ground.

He thus reached the top of the stairs, side by side with the unhappy maiden, and emerged into the small courtyard. Here the freshness of the open air and the sight of the sun seemed to turn the current of his thoughts. He remembered Ermelinda, who was expecting him; he felt she would die of fright and grief were she to see her daughter in that plight too suddenly, and this idea at once brought back his accustomed vigour of mind. He made signs to his attendants to stop, and with a firm voice and so composed a manner as surprised them all, he ordered the lights to be extinguished, the crowd to disperse without noise, and silence to be observed as to what they had seen below, while he himself went in front of Lauretta and the bearers of Beatrice into the apartments of the warder's wife.

Having placed the daughter of the Count on a bed, Marco asked her waiting-maid when her mistress expired.

"She was alive a very little while ago," replied Lauretta, in a voice broken with sobs, "and she died in my arms of fright when she heard the prison door broken in, and we both thought they were come to murder us."

Meanwhile the castle leech, who had been immediately summoned, arrived; he examined the prostrate form, and held a candle to her lips, and thought he could perceive the flame was stirred by a very slight breath. Lauretta and the seneschal's wife exerted themselves to use every means they could to revive her. By degrees the heart began to beat and the pulse could be felt, and the limbs recovered a portion of vital warmth. But her strength had been consumed by a long course of suffering, both of mind and body, and she was now in a burning fever. Would she live to see the morrow?

Marco, who had been almost beside himself at the unexpected joy of finding that she was still alive, now dropped his head in despair, and said to himself, "Here is the fulfilment of the prophet's words," and then with the air of one who has nothing more to hope or fear in

this world, approached the wife of Pelagrua, and questioned her about Ottorino.

The woman who, from certain expressions let drop by Lodrisio in her presence, suspected that Beatrice's husband was shut up in the castle of Binasco, communicated her suspicions to Marco, who at once determined to put himself on Ottorino's track. So he left the sick girl's chamber, thinking that it would be better for her to be left alone with her maid, so that as soon as she recovered her senses, which were now fast returning, she might first rest her eyes on none other but that beloved and faithful countenance.

"Now go and call Beatrice's mother," he then said to the seneschal's wife, "and bid her pray, and pray also for me."

So saying, he hurried out of the courtyard, left some orders with the judge of the locality, and rode across the drawbridge, which was immediately raised behind him.

The room into which Beatrice had been carried looked out on an esplanade in front of the eastern face of the castle. The sun, which was now high, poured its rays in through a window opposite the bed where she lay and threw a bright glow over her face, which only rendered its deathly pallor more apparent. On first coming to herself the young girl opened her eyes and immediately closed them again, raising her hand to keep the light from her face, as it caused her much discomfort from the long hours she had spent in the dark dungeon from whence she had so lately been rescued.

The damsel closed the shutters immediately, and then returned to her seat by her mistress's side, and embraced her, weeping and calling her by her name. She seemed to hear these sobs, and recognize this voice, and opening her eyes again she gazed on the girl for some time as if bewildered, and then said, "Is it you, Lauretta?"

"Yes, it is I. Don't be afraid any more; we are free. Be of good cheer."

But she, who did not take in the sense of these words, asked timidly, "Where have those wretches gone? Have they yet broken into the prison? I heard their shouts,

and felt the blows of their daggers. Oh, tell me, they have not killed me yet! I thought I was dead, and they were carrying me to be buried among so many people and in a blaze of torchlight. It was night, and now it is day again all at once. Where are we now?"

"We are in the apartments of our good friend here, the seneschal's wife; but I tell you, we are free, and it was Marco himself who came——"

The mention of that terrible name was like the touch of burning iron to rouse a fainting person. Beatrice struggled to sit up in bed, and said, "Oh, let us escape! hide me, save me, for mercy's sake!"

"Oh, no! try and be calm. Marco is not here, and you may be sure that no one shall enter this room but those you wish. We are free, I say again, and do you know the good news I have to tell you? Your mother has arrived."

"My mother?"

"Yes, your mother, and as soon as you are recovered sufficiently to bear the journey, we shall return home with her."

"Oh! you are not deceiving me again! Don't you remember how often you have told me that she would come? and then——"

"But now she is here, I tell you she is here, and you will see her directly."

"No, dear girl, your kindness is cruel; no, I shall never see her again. I have prayed God so often for this favour, with so many tears and such earnestness! He has never been willing to hear me, and now it would be too late."

"Oh, my child!" cried Ermelinda at this moment, in a voice almost exhausted with anguish. She had been detained in the next room by the doctor, for fear of the first shock of joy having too great an effect on the weakened strength of the invalid; but she had heard every word, and being no longer able to restrain her loving impulses, now threw herself into her daughter's arms.

Beatrice leant her head on her mother's shoulder, and

thus they remained pressed to each other for a long time in silence.

Ermelinda was the first to withdraw from that tender, but sad embrace; and laying her hand gently on her child's head, she said to her: "Now you must rest—you see, I am with you, never to leave you again; we will be always together, always, always; my poor, precious Beatrice! All your troubles are at an end, you must only think now of happiness, think of your mother, who is with you, and who will never leave your side."

Beatrice obeyed, and laid her head for a moment on the pillows; but then, unable to control herself, she raised it quickly, and lifting up her arms again, she entwined them round her mother's neck; and as the lady gently resisted, making a sign to her in some alarm to desist, the daughter said: "No, let me satisfy the longing of so many sorrowful days and nights; let me enjoy this consolation, let me forget myself in a delight which may be the last of my life."

"I implore you to be calm; so much emotion—so weak as you are—"

"Oh, no," replied Beatrice; "believe me, nothing but good can come of it, it soothes me to be with you, let me be;" and pressing her, and kissing her face, and bathing it with hot tears, she did nothing but repeat, with loving murmurs: "Oh, my mother! my dear mother!"

Ermelinda, overcome by those feelings which overrule everything, let herself be wrapped in her daughter's arms, and weeping also herself, gave her back, tenderly, the kisses and caresses she received from her. It was a sad scene, but also a comforting one, for it was a peaceful and almost a sacred sight to see the two poor creatures mingle their tears together in never-ending embraces and tender expressions of love, and amid all this to hear them describe their long misery during the time of their separation.

"Do you know that your father is here also?" said Ermelinda, when she was calm enough to be able to speak.

"Why does he not come in?" asked the girl, her face lit up with a happy smile at the prospect of a new joy.

The Count was summoned, and he entered with mingled feelings of emotion and fear. But when he saw his daughter, so emaciated and so weakened, take one arm from her mother's neck and extend it affectionately towards him, his fears were conquered by his love, and no other feelings than those of a father remained in him. He ran to her, and embracing her, said tenderly: "You are ill, my child."

"Oh, no! now that I am with my dear parents, I am well, only too well—but Ottorino?"

The Count screwed up his lips, as if he was taking a bitter medicine, and could not prevent himself from letting these words escape him: "Oh, for God's sake, don't speak about him here in this place!"

"Is he not my husband?" returned the girl, with a gesture that savoured somewhat of resentment; then turning to her mother with increased tenderness, she said: "Is he alive? can I hope to see him?"

"Oh, yes! God has preserved him to us," answered Ermelinda. "From what the seneschal's wife tells me, he must be at Binasco; and Marco himself has gone from here to seek for him, and bring him here as soon as he has found him."

"Marco!" exclaimed with one voice both father and daughter, both startled by surprise and terror, though from different causes.

"Yes, Marco Visconti," repeated the lady; and then she began to give an account of the interview she had had with him the night before; she exonerated Visconti from every fault of which he appeared to be guilty; she spoke of the intense grief he felt for his previous share in the plot against the marriage. She told of his resolution to make amends, even at the cost of his own life; she described his increased friendliness towards Ottorino, and did not even refrain from owning his love to Beatrice, now that that love, purified by remorse and repentance, had changed into an anxious desire for her welfare, and

last of all she spoke not so much in commendation as in extenuation of the man, in order to remove any shade of suspicion, every trace of rancour, in the mind of her husband as well as in that of her daughter.

The latter, who had begun to listen with tremulous anxiety, raised her eyes to heaven at the end of her mother's speech, and clasping her hands together, exclaimed, "May God forgive him!" Then turning again to her mother, she said, "Did you tell me that he has gone to seek for Ottorino? Do you really believe that my husband will get here in time to see me?"

"Oh, do not speak in that way, my child," exclaimed Ermelinda, in a tenderly reproachful voice, "my dearest, life and death are in the hands of a merciful God—He will not allow—in pity to us——" and then she was silent.

Beatrice took her mother's hand and kissed it; the one ventured not to ask, nor the other to utter words of hope—a hope that neither of them really felt.

During the whole of that day the malady continued to take a firmer hold of that form, which was too weak and broken to stand against it.

The girl, obedient to the orders of the physician, enforced on her by Ermelinda's still more urgent injunctions, lay in perfect silence and stillness, contenting herself with gazing fixedly on her beloved mother, who was sitting by the bedside, and following her with her eyes whenever anything required her to change her position.

Lauretta also was seated at the foot of the bed—that faithful attendant, who, although entreated by everyone, including Beatrice, refused absolutely to leave the room to snatch a few moments of repose, of which she must have been sorely in need after the trying vigils of the preceding nights. She was relating at intervals in subdued tones to the lady, the history of the miseries that she had suffered, together with her young mistress, from the time that they had been taken to Rosate, down to that very moment. She gave her an account of the falsehoods and the threats which had been used to make

Beatrice renounce her allegiance to her husband, to induce her to give him up, and to look with a favourable eye on that terrible man, whom they both supposed was the author of all that persecution. Nor was she silent about the kindness shown to them by the seneschal's wife, who, as far as the difficulties of the situation and the constant suspicions of her husband allowed, had lost no opportunity of offering them prudent advice and every kind of consolation. Ermelinda, deeply moved by this recital, cast from time to time a compassionate look on her daughter, who had so cruelly suffered. She, on her part, perceiving clearly the subject of the conversation, responded to these glances with a loving smile.

But the repose of the sick chamber was disturbed at times by distant noises in the castle. Beatrice listened intently; a slight flush suffused her cheeks, and she anxiously asked, "Is he come?"

The mother immediately left the room, but soon returned with a negative reply, at the same time adding a few words of hope and encouragement.

Towards evening the invalid, who felt continually getting weaker, asked for a confessor, and after a long interview with an old Benedictine friar, who was called in to assist her, she again expressed a wish to see her parents.

"Listen, my daughter," said the priest to her; "Ottorino is not here, but we expect him at daybreak."

At this she appeared much agitated, and exclaimed, "Ottorino, my husband, my dear husband! Would it had pleased God to grant me the unspeakable favour to be permitted to see him before I die."

"Come, my child," said the pious monk, "resign him to Him who gave him to you, and adore the eternal dispensations of justice and mercy; so will He vouchsafe to accept this sacrifice of your heart as an atonement for your sins, and for your soul's health."

The poor girl clasped her hands and raised her eyes to heaven, in an attitude of deep but mournful resignation; but Ermelinda, laying her hand gently on her

head, exclaimed, "Oh, my daughter! my beloved daughter! have I then to lose you? What is there left to me in this world except you? You, who were my sole consolation and support!"

The girl drooped her head and wept. In a few moments she replied in a voice choked with sobs: "Consolation did you say? And what consolation did you ever receive from this poor wretched creature, who, by her perversity, has sown so many thorns in the path of your life? Oh, my beloved mother! I do not ask you to forgive me, for I know you have already forgiven me everything. And you, too, my father, have given me your pardon, have you not?"

Ermelinda and the Count, choked by their tears, could not utter a word, and all remained some time in silence. Meantime the waiting-maid, after having brought to the invalid a cordial, had thrown herself on a seat by the side of the bed, and overcome by fatigue and trouble, by degrees let her head drop on the quilt and fell fast asleep. Beatrice, who perceived this, without moving her hand, which was on her damsel's shoulder, beckoned with the other to the bystanders to keep very quiet and make no noise; she herself, from time to time, exchanged a few words with the confessor in a very low voice, for indeed she was nearly exhausted. The pious monk, touched by her kind consideration, followed her example. At first she had her sheets and pillows constantly arranged; at one time she wanted to be raised, at another to be turned round, as is customary with invalids who cannot find rest in any attitude; but now she forced herself to remain quiet in the position she was in, scarcely daring to draw her breath, for fear of waking her beloved attendant, on whose countenance she looked with an expression of the most affectionate kindness.

When Lauretta awoke, the dawn was breaking, and the flame of the lamp at the bedside was growing pale beneath the first beams of day, which appeared through the window.

The damsel looked round with astonished eyes, not

knowing where she was, till she met Beatrice's kind glance and smile. "You are with me," said the young mistress—"with your own dear Beatrice." Lauretta looked down, sorry and ashamed that her physical fatigue should have made her forget, even for a short time, her beloved lady in her extreme illness. But the latter, guessing this feeling, encouraged her by asking her to perform some slight service for her, and by gratefully receiving those attentions which the maiden, with redoubled anxiety, offered her.

Towards sunrise she said she felt tired, and wished to rest. She lay back, closed her eyes, and had a short sleep—a weary and troubled sleep. All of a sudden she started up, raised her head from the pillows, and then let it fall again; a cold perspiration covered her face, she ceased to breathe, and her pulse could not be felt; there was a general fearful belief that she was gone. It was, however, but a passing failure of the heart—a swoon, from which she soon recovered, and looked round on her beloved ones, who were in despair. "Why are you weeping?" she said, "for I am still with you."

They all came round her, and she, after having recovered her breath, turned to her mother and continued: "However, I feel that life is ebbing, and my hour is near; now be calm, and listen to my last words, the last wish of my soul."

She drew a ring from her finger and gave it to her mother, saying, "This was given to me by Ottorino in your presence; the symbol of a union that is to last but for a short time on this earth, but which will be renewed in paradise. If you ever see him again, put it into his hands, for him to show me on some future day. And tell him at the same time, that at this solemn moment, expecting soon to find myself alone in my Creator's hands, I ask of him one last petition, in the name of the love he has borne me, and for the sake of his and my eternal salvation, I implore him never to seek to revenge on any one the sorrows I have suffered here."

She rested for a moment, and then pointing to the damsel at the foot of the bed: "I need not commend

her to you; you have always loved her; but after all she has well suffered for my sake, and as she has acted a sister's part to me, I hope that she may be to you as a daughter. She will be more obedient than—the one—you have loved too much." And turning to Lauretta: "Will you promise me?"

"Oh yes, indeed," was the answer, "I will never leave them as long as I live; I will always remain with them."

She now felt her strength fail, and was silent. She remained some time as if dozing, and then opening her eyes slowly, she looked at the window, through which the sun was shining, and murmured to herself, "Oh, my dear mountains!"

The mother drew nearer her, and she, speaking with difficulty and weakness, uttered these words: "There, in the churchyard at Limonta, in the little chapel—where my poor brother lies; where we have prayed and wept together so often—let me rest near him. You can come, then, and weep and pray for us both. I shall have the goodwill of those dear people. Remember me to them all, and poor Marta, who also has a child in that holy place."

The weeping mother answered more by signs than by words, that all her wishes should be fulfilled. Then the monk, seeing that there only remained to the sufferer a few moments of life, put on his stole, blessed her, and began to repeat over her the prayers for those at the point of death. All present knelt down around the bed, and made the responses amid their sobs. Beatrice herself appeared to take part in the holy words sometimes by a faint murmur, and sometimes by a slow and devout movement of her head; her serene countenance bore witness to the inward peace of her pious soul, which amid the pains of death tasted the joys of another life.

But all at once, the sacred calm reigning in the sick room was disturbed by the sound of agitated steps on the staircase. Every eye turned to the door. The seneschal's wife, rising to her feet, went to meet two persons who now appeared there, and exchanged some words with them. One of the new comers stopped on

the threshold; but the other, darting into the room, flung himself on his knees by the bed, pressed and kissed it, and bathed it with his tears.

Ermelinda, the Count, and Lauretta, at once recognized Ottorino; the others guessed who he must be.

The youth had that moment arrived from the Castle of Binasco, in company with the very man in whose name he had been kept a prisoner there, and who had himself hastened to set him free.

The dying girl, startled by this sudden noise, opened her eyes languidly, and without being able to see who he was—for he was hidden from her by the bystanders—asked what had happened.

"Give God the praise!" exclaimed the confessor with much emotion; "you accepted from his hands a bitter trial, you accepted it even with resignation; now accept in the same spirit the joy he vouchsafes to you, that both the joy and the submission may be pleasing in God's sight."

"Who? Ottorino?" said Beatrice, now in the agony of death, and making a last effort to utter his name.

"Yes; your husband," repeated the priest, and approaching the youth, he made him rise and led him towards her. Beatrice fixed on his face her eyes, shining with a light that was nearly spent, and stretched out one hand, on which he laid his throbbing brow.

After a moment, the dying one drew her hand gently away and held it before her husband's eyes, pointing at the same time to her mother, and attempting to utter some words distinctly.

The monk guessed her desire, and said to the youth: "She wishes to tell you of the wedding-ring which she has given to her mother, and which you will receive from her."

Beatrice's face was lighted up with a smile, at her meaning being understood.

Then Ermelinda drew the ring from her finger, and gave it to Ottorino, who kissed it and said: "I shall carry it with me to my grave."

"Your wife has a dying request to make to you,"

continued the priest; "to the effect that you should lay aside any thought you may have conceived of avenging her. Vengeance belongeth to the Lord."

She kept her eyes anxiously fixed on the young knight's face. He remained with his head lowered, and answered nothing, but the confessor, taking him by the arm: "Now you will promise," he said, in a grave and stern voice, "you will promise your wife, as she is passing from life to death, from time to eternity; she asks it you as a favour, she imposes it on you as a duty, in the name of that God before whom she is now about to appear."

"Yes, I promise," answered Ottorino, bursting into an agony of tears.

Beatrice thanked him with a look of angelic sweetness, which showed clearly that she had nothing left to desire in this world.

Then the priest signed to those around to kneel down again, and he resumed the interrupted prayers. Once only, during a moment of general silence, the dying girl became aware of a sound of repressed sobs which came from the next room, and looked up at her mother, as if asking the meaning of it; the latter only bent her head down, not having the heart to utter a name; but the priest, bending over the dying girl, said in a low voice, "Pray also for him, for him above all; it is Marco Visconti."

The saintly Beatrice bowed her head in obedience to this last injunction. She never raised it again, for she was dead.

CHAPTER XXXII.

MARCO hurried from the room followed by Ottorino, who was deeply agitated, even amid the dire anguish of that fatal hour, by anxiety for the life of his lord. He also felt the necessity of tearing himself away from a spectacle that was more than he could bear, and of setting to work at something that would bring him to his senses, and restore the equilibrium of his mind, that had been so rudely shaken.

The great captain, drawing his hand across his face and eyes, as if wishing to drive a dark cloud away which obstructed his vision, strode along the gallery till he came to a turret staircase, stopped for a moment before an open door, doubtful whether to enter or not. But all of a sudden he felt suffocated—that he must be in the open air—and so continued his hurried ascent of the stairs. Higher and higher he went, till he came out on to the leads of a lofty tower; here he stopped to breathe, and to gaze at the magnificent view set off by the mixture of clouds and sunlight, then dropping his head on his breast he folded his arms, and leant against one of the battlements for some time in silence. His eyes were dry and motionless, his face stern and composed; while on his broad forehead, wrinkled now and again by a kind of spasmodic contraction, the phantoms, so to speak, of the fierce thoughts that filled his soul, seemed to chase one another in swift succession.

After a while he called to mind his youthful follower, who was standing a little way off gazing at him in silence, and exclaimed, "Why have you left her?"

"She is in her parents' hands," replied Ottorino.

"True," rejoined Visconti, "and it ill becomes us to stay weeping here, when we ought to be up and doing.

Do you go down that staircase; on the first landing you will find the marshal's room; tell him to send Pelagrua up here, as I wish to ask him a question, and come back with him yourself, as I must have you here."

Ottorino seemed to hesitate for a moment, but Marco guessed his thoughts at once. "Do not fear to leave me here alone," he replied. "What remains to me of life is not mine to dispose of, so long as I have wrongs to avenge, so long as a debt of blood remains on my soul. When anguish shall have been paid for with anguish, then——. But no, Marco will never die a craven's death, despairing like an infidel."

The young man departed, and Marco remained with arms folded, awaiting the coming of Pelagrua.

The latter was then in the castle. We must now tell the story of his departure and subsequent return.

After the conversation he and Lodrisio had had with Beatrice, the two rascals saw clearly it would be impossible to persuade her to acquiesce in any way in their iniquitous design, so, seeing her strength diminish day by day, they resolved to free themselves from her once for all, she being, so far as they were concerned, an unwelcome, not to say dangerous, encumbrance. The seneschal of Rosate, as was understood, the very same night that Marco arrived in Milan, and at the very moment he was conversing with Ermelinda, had shut up Ottorino's bride and her waiting-maid in the dungeon, where he intended to leave them to die; he then went to Fallavecchia, a village near Rosate, and stayed there till late in the evening.

On his return to the castle, little guessing, as may be supposed, the events that had happened in the meantime, he was taken into custody. Being examined by the marshal, at first he tried to put a good face on the matter, but on hearing that Marco was there, and that Beatrice had been discovered, he gave himself up for lost.

Two soldiers then seized hold of him and forced him up to the top of the tower. At every step he implored Ottorino, who was behind him, to help him, and save

him from the first outburst of his master's fury. On coming into Marco's presence he fell on his knees, and with his teeth chattering with terror, stammered out a few broken sentences, "Mercy, mercy!—I supposed—I had no bad intentions—I only wanted—but it was Lodrisio—Lodrisio forced me into it—forgive me, and I will tell you, and you will see."

But Visconti, after casting one glance of rage and abhorrence on the wretched creature, instead of listening to his entreaties, glanced over a bundle of papers which one of the two gendarmes had placed in his hands by the marshal's order, then, looking up, he ordered the men to withdraw, and handing the bundle to Ottorino as it was, he said, "These are your letters which were found in the unhappy girl's room."

The young man took them, and began examining them.

Meanwhile Marco again cast his eyes on the seneschal, who lay prostrate before him, groaning and crying for mercy—and giving him a kick on the shoulder, "Get up, you villain!" he called out in a voice of thunder. The wretch obeyed. At the sight of that countenance, on which there was a strange mixture of abject terror, malice, and ferocity, the Lord of Rosate felt his blood boil. He paced once or twice backward and forward along the leads to calm himself, then stopped close to Pelagrua and began to question him.

"When was Lodrisio here?"

But before there was time for an answer Ottorino came up to Marco, and showing him the letters, exclaimed furiously, "It is a barefaced and cruel lie! These letters are not mine."

Marco snatched the letters from him, and, brandishing them in Pelagrua's face, who trembled more than ever at hearing Ottorino's words, asked him, in a voice choked with passion, "Whose are they, then?"

"It was," stammered the poor wretch—"it was—to obey you—to do you service."

Visconti's eyes flashed fire. "Ugh! you hell-hound!" he roared like a madman; and therewith he dealt him

such a blow in the face, that he broke his jaw, and then seizing hold of him, he pitched him headlong from the tower, at the foot of which he was found dead the next morning, impaled on one of the spiked posts in the fosse.

This done, Marco retired to his apartments, and ordered that no one should follow him, not even Ottorino. Here he remained shut up alone till far into the night, searching in the cabinets round the rooms, examining paper after paper, burning the majority, replacing some, annotating others. He then wrote a number of letters, and made his will, wherein, after providing an ample annuity for Pelagrua's widow, and bequeathing legacies to his squires, pages, and the other members of his immense household, he made Ottorino his heir. At midnight he sent for the monk who had attended Beatrice, and desired to be shriven by him; after which he threw himself into an armchair, and slept quietly for about two hours, according to the account given by one of his body servants, who, unperceived by him, had been watching him in silence from an adjoining chamber. When he awoke he called for something to drink, and drank off at one gulp a large beaker of water that was brought him, and then finding it impossible to get to sleep again, and not caring to stay there doing nothing till daybreak, he went out into a gallery and began pacing backwards and forwards like an unquiet spirit, ever intent, amid the silence and darkness of the night, on a feeble light, and a low murmur as of prayer that issued from a chamber opposite.

Meanwhile, Lodrisio, who was in Milan, agitated by innumerable suspicions, owing to the messenger he had despatched to the Castle of Rosate having failed to return, had sent thither some trusty retainers of his own, who, after a careful investigation of the affair, had informed him of all that had happened; how his letter had fallen into Marco's hands; how Beatrice had been discovered in the dungeons, and was since dead; how Ottorino had been liberated, and the seneschal interrogated, and then put to death by Marco's own hand—all had been told him. From this he saw clearly that, as

all his machinations had been detected, there remained no excuse or subterfuge whereby he could avert the wrath of his terrible chief, whose confidence he had so cruelly and perfidiously abused. The wretch already fancied he saw Marco before him calling him to account with inexorable fury; and bold and undaunted as he was by nature, being one of the most valiant knights of the age, he lacked the hardihood to face an adversary of that calibre, one who was reputed to be the first lance in Lombardy. Besides, if matters were to come to the ordeal of battle, things would be sure to come out that would stamp him with infamy for the rest of his days.

This miscreant, then, being thus driven to desperation, in order to escape from the punishment due to his last act of treachery, planned and carried out another, still more vile and more abominable than the first.

He wrote to Azzone, feigning repentance for his former perfidy, and revealed to him all Marco's machinations for depriving him of the government, by laying before him the most irrefragable proofs, through an infinity of letters and other documents that were in his hands. He sent the letters to their proper addresses, and left word with his servants, that if Marco came to ask for him, they were to say he had gone to the palace to see the Viceroy on business. This done, he jumped on his horse, galloped through the Porta Giovia, and never dismounted until he was well outside the boundaries of the Milanese territory.

Marco, beside himself with rage and grief, seemed to spurn the earth he trod, the morning air he breathed, and the sun which threw its light on his path. He rushed off to Milan breathing blood and vengeance, and deceived by the false intelligence he obtained at Lodrisio's house, he went straight to the Viceroy's Palace, where the reader will easily guess what kind of welcome awaited him.

Leaving the attendant whom he had brought with him in an ante-room, he went forward alone, and asked some of the servants about the culprit of whom he was in search.

"He is in there," replied one of them, pointing to a door, and obsequiously running to open it for him.

Marco went unsuspiciously on, and passing the threshold, entered a long room; but scarcely had he set foot in it, when the door closed behind him with a slam, that sounded like iron, and in an instant there rushed out of various hiding-places six armed men, clad in mail, with helmets on and visors down, who attacked him from all sides at once. At the first onset they wounded him in the throat and side; they then threw themselves upon him, one taking him by the shoulders, another round the waist, while a third tried to twist his legs and throw him down. He then felt on his left side for his dagger, but could not find it, as one of his assailants had had the presence of mind and dexterity to take it away just at the critical moment. Marco saw that all was over, but determined not to perish without a struggle; so he clenched his fist, which no one had been able to imprison, and let it fall with such force on a man's head who was just giving him a stab in the breast, that the fellow dropped to the ground like a bull knocked down by a sledge-hammer. The others, however, kept pressing upon him, and dragged him, weltering in his blood, to a window looking out on the street; they then took him up by his arms and legs, and with one mighty effort threw him down on the pavement, where he expired in a few minutes.

Nothing was talked of for some time in Milan, Lombardy, and indeed all over Italy, but the sad end of the renowned captain. The dark story of his unsuccessful love was mingled, as may be supposed, with that of his death. Some people believed, or pretended to believe, in order to curry favour with those in power, whose great object was to cast off the odium of that sort of treachery, that Marco himself, having murdered Beatrice in a fit of jealousy, had afterwards in despair stabbed himself with his own hand, and thrown himself out of the palace window. These reports were collected together and handed down by some contemporary scribbler, either deceived himself, or too timid to be a lover of

truth. Azario, more circumspect, says that nothing is known for certain as to his fate, and that many things were laid to his charge that were untrue, while much that was true was omitted.

Beyond Lombardy, however, where the fear of the Visconti did not extend, no one doubted but that Marco had been assassinated by the order of his nephew and his own brothers. Not to mention other authorities, Giovanni Villani, who was intimately acquainted with Marco at Florence, and had often had dealings with him over the Lucca affair, says so distinctly, and explains the obscurity and uncertainty of our chronicles in regard thereto, in the following significant words: "The Milanese were much shocked by the miserable death of Messer Marco, but no one dared to speak of it for fear of the consequences."

In order to make known to our readers what was thought of this awful catastrophe at Lucca at the time, or to speak more accurately, what was thought of it by a Lucchese minstrel, we will subjoin at full length a lay which was sung at a knight's banquet on the day of the murder.

LAY ON THE DEATH OF MARCO VISCONTI.

Blood reeks upon the Palace stairs,
And blood the threshold dyes;
Oh horror! whence the sight which scares
The eager anxious eyes
Of that vast throng, who press along,
With looks of wrath and shame,
Low mutt'rings fierce, and sullen roar,
Like some devouring flame?

Whence come ye? hapless ones, declare!
Methought—but no—and yet,
By the twisted snake on the arms ye bear,
And the visage nobly set,
(Though dark that mien, with gath'ring spleen)
I mark you from afar,
And by unerring signs discern
That Milanese ye are.

The shudd'ring crowd an instant part,
And lo! a soldier there,
While rage and anguish fill his heart,
And horror-struck despair—
With one hand shows a ghastly sight,
The other veils his eyes;
For in the dust a murdered knight,
His corse yet quiv'ring, lies!

'Tis Marco—can this form be thine,
Thou knight of prowess bold,
Whose warrior's might and statesman's light
The factious Guelph controlled?
And through the land thy dauntless hand
Did countless triumphs gain,
Leaving a name of matchless fame
On Lombardy's wide plain.

Weep, weep, and mourn with sore lament
The noble and the brave,
His gallant life thus early spent,
And his untimely grave;
Alas! the grim, grey cloud of death
Now o'er his visage lies,
To quench the light of valour bright
Once gleaming in those eyes.

But hark, once more, a sudden yell
Bursts from the angry crowd,
"The coward act who did it? Tell
The miscreant's name aloud.
Who dared to raise his traitor's hand?
Who dealt the felon blow?
Disgrace and shame they bore his name
Who laid the great one low.

"Come close, thou friend in death, speak clear,
And let thy words be true,
Did that brave heart unknown to fear
Fair lady's love subdue?
Did he who never turned aside
From his unflinching way,
Lay at her feet his might and pride
As rumours wildly say?"

For all reply he bade me mount
Behind him on his horse,
Through wood and glade, by forest shade
We took our rapid course;

With breathless speed, still flying fast
O'er field and lonely plain,
Before a castle's gate at last
He drew the bridle rein.

The gates fly back, the bridge doth groan
With harsh and grating sound,
Now reared on high, now forward thrown
Loud clashing on the ground—
The hinges creak—the bolts are drawn—
The chains of iron fall,
But ne'er a trace of human face
Appears in that vast hall.

Through porch and gateway, open court,
And passage long, and drear,
By colonnade and balustrade,
But not a soul is near.
No footfall breaks the stillness dread,
No sound, no voice is there—
A hush as of the silent dead
Holds the sepulchral air.

* * * *

In the distance, trembling,
See yon light so faint,
With pale gleam dissembling
Forms it fain would paint.
Darksome vaults discov'ring
With its feeble ray,
Where the gloom is hov'ring,
Still far, far away.

Scarce through shadows glimm'ring,
That faint flick'ring light
Now falls gently shimm'ring,
And arrests the sight.
For in death reposing
On an unknown bier,
Youth and life deposing,
A virgin lieth here.

On that pillow rigid
Rests that cheek so pale,
Where, with numb hand frigid,
Death has spread his veil.
Yet in all its glory,
See that last sweet smile
Which o'er her sad story
Bids us pause awhile.

See than marble whiter
Her fair neck and throat,
Where, than sunbeams brighter,
Her long hair doth float.
In great masses shining
To her feet it rolled,
Form so lovely twining
With a web of gold.

Lo! the lips divided
Joy divine to hail,
The transparent eyelid
Scarce the sight doth veil.
Thus she gently sleeping,
As an Angel lay,
And her watch seemed keeping
For the dawn of day.

Spirit who in Heaven,
Blest and pure dost dwell,
If to thee 'tis given
This thy mortal shell
Lovingly to visit—

* * * *

But hark, from the distant plain, a sound
Of solemn dirge and wail,
Now nearer seems to float around,
Borne on the gentle gale.

Still onwards comes the mournful moan,
With hollow sound and dumb
The bridge resounds, where tread unknown
The strangers' feet who come.

And now a light dispels the gloom,
While slowly, two by two,
The black-cowled Monks approach the tomb
In rev'rent order due.

Then next, arrayed in mantles rare,
With heavy step and sad,
Six knights the corse of Marco bear
In bright steel armour clad.

Within that darksome cell is laid
The warrior in his pride,
The bravest knight, the fairest maid,
Are resting side by side.

They raised the helm, and o'er his face
A smile there seemed to play,
As if in that dark resting-place,
He knew she near him lay.

Conclusion.

The minstrel of Lucca, either misled by false reports in Tuscany or by the desire to embellish the bare details so as to give more brilliancy to his song, would have us believe that Marco and Beatrice were buried together in the Castle of Rosate. But we, on the best authority, can assure our readers that Visconti was buried with great honours at Milan, in the Church of Santa Maria Maggiore, and that the body of Ottorino's bride was borne to Limonta, according to her last wishes.

We wish to make this known, so as not to fall under the usual imputations cast upon historians and chroniclers, namely, that they speak with confidence upon matters which they either know nothing about, or which rest upon very slender authority, while they are altogether silent concerning subjects with which they are perfectly well acquainted, or else embellish, amplify, and give an entirely new colouring to them, in fact, making use of all the artifices suggested by rhetoric and often recommended by prudence. But no, gentle readers, we must protest against historians bearing the whole brunt of this accusation, when poets often avail themselves of the same privilege.

Having made this necessary confession, there seems to be nothing more left to say, as after the death of the man who might be called the hero of the tale, the tale itself ought properly to end.

However, if we do not weary our readers, we will add a few words as to the other persons who have so long occupied our attention. And this we do more especially as a tribute to the softer sex, who with their usual gentleness of disposition allow themselves to feel a sort of affection for the persons with whom they have been so closely connected for the time being, however unworthy of their attention they may be, impelled thereto rather by their

own tenderness of heart than by the merits of the characters who have drawn it forth. This kindliness, springing from the natural softness of their nature, deserves its reward, and it is on their account, and to please them, that we gather up the scattered threads of our history. But do not be alarmed, we will not detain you long.

The Count and Countess del Balzo, with Lauretta, left Rosate the morning after Beatrice's death, on their way to Limonta, whither they conveyed the remains of their cherished daughter. On the way they were rejoined by those of their household who had been left at Milan.

This party who came from Milan had left it before the dreadful catastrophe of Marco's death, so nothing was heard of it till they reached Leveso, where, having arrived at dusk, they dismounted at an hostelry to pass the night. It was almost impossible to persuade them of the truth of the event, as they had so lately left the city where it was said to have taken place. Lupo and Ambrose were disputing the possibility of the event with the host and some of the villagers, and comparing the hours and distances, when a courier arrived, who, as soon as the fatal news reached Rosate, had started on the track of the Del Balzo family, and had just then rejoined them.

The new arrival was a faithful servant of Visconti, and confirmed, with many tears, the report of his master's fearful end; then taking Ermelinda aside, he placed in her hands a letter from Marco, found, as he said, on his master's table. The Countess was overcome with mingled horror and pity, which touched her heart deeply, overwhelmed and lacerated as it was by feelings of maternal anguish. She felt herself shuddering, her sight grew dim, she trembled in every limb, and replacing in her bosom the letter, which at the moment she was unable to open, much less to read, she sank on a chair as if she had lost all consciousness.

Lupo at once remounted his horse and galloped off to Milan in search of Ottorino, who, in this extremity, might require his services. All were stunned at the news, but compared with the horror and stupefaction of the Count, the wonder of the others was nothing.

And in truth, to have had any connection with Marco, with the man who was said to have been assassinated by the Lord of Milan in consequence of some conspiracy they had discovered, might easily, at that first moment, have alarmed a more timid man than the Count.

But Azzone, frightened perhaps at the extent of the plot he had found out, thought it prudent to draw a veil over it, that he might not risk the consequences of such a crime; so that not only Count del Balzo, not worthy of their consideration on account of his own insignificance, but even Marco's most ardent and powerful supporters were allowed to pass freely without molestation of any kind.

Meanwhile the negotiations went on, which had been on foot for some time, to effect the reconciliation of the Visconti with the Church. The Pope, already disposed to favour the Lord of Milan on account of the late resistance he had made to the Bavarian, did not believe, or pretended not to believe, the reports which accused Azzone of being his uncle's murderer, and having absolved him and his family from excommunication, he took off the interdict which had weighed so heavily and for so many years on the city and province of Milan. The festivities and rejoicings which this caused were marvellous. The lay lords who had usurped the possessions of the clergy restored them to the priests, who were returning from every direction. Among these was the legitimate Abbot of San Ambrogio, Astolfo da Lampugnano, who, on returning to his convent, from which he had so long been excluded, was reinstated in all his former possessions, Limonta included. On his arrival at Milan he wrote a long letter to the parish priest, praising him and all the Limontese for the fidelity they had shown towards their rightful lord, compassionating them for all the vexations they had endured under the usurping abbot, upon whom the usual epithets of schismatic, heretic, magician, son of a demon, were unsparingly heaped; but what was most important to them, he granted them exemptions and privileges as compensation for past evils.

These worthy mountaineers reopened their little Church of St. Bernardo with great solemnity; the bell, making up for its long silence, rang out and chimed thanksgivings for three successive days and nights without intermission, and the men and boys vied with each other in pulling the ropes, climbing up to the roof, and swinging and striking it with bars and stones as they best could. They raised rustic triumphal arches, organized processions, and chanted masses, matins, compline, and vespers, which were quite novelties. Last of all they celebrated a general mass for those who had died during the interdict, after which they all walked two and two, men first, women afterwards, into the churchyard, where they knelt down and went through their rosaries. A pious and serious contrition, a grave and silent joy, could be seen on their faces, so devoutly bent down in prayer.

Amid so many recollections of domestic affliction and individual bereavements, the eyes of these good people were turned from time to time on the little chapel, within which had been placed a few days before, a white tombstone, with a name dear to all engraved upon it.

Marta, who had been kneeling on the spot of ground that covered the remains of her Arigozzo, rose to depart when she had finished her prayers, but as she passed near the stone in question, she stooped down and kissed it with reverence and affection; and her example was followed by the falconer's wife and by all the other women of the village in turn—Ermelinda and Lauretta, however, who were still among the congregation, could not bear so great an effort, but returned alone in the evening, going down the mountain paths without being seen, to weep and pray over that grave; and this became every day the termination of their lonely rambles.

Lupo took no part in these solemnities; he had set off with Ottorino for the Holy Land. Now that Beatrice and Marco were dead, the young knight could no longer bear to be beneath his native sky; to feel that he was near Lodrisio made his blood boil. Gladly would he have sought him out, to measure himself against him in

mortal combat; but he had promised his dying wife that he would not seek for revenge; that promise being sacred to him, he left his native land in order to keep it.

On that day another of our acquaintances, Tremacoldo, had arrived at Limonta. He was welcomed by Ermelinda as a near and dear relative, in memory of all that he had done and suffered for her poor Beatrice.

The festivities being now over, the jester proposed to depart, and the Countess, mindful of her promise, and unable to induce him to accept anything whatever, gave him a letter of recommendation to the Apostolic Legate, Bertrando del Poggetto. With this Tremacoldo repaired to Bologna, and returned with full absolution for the excommunication he had incurred by following a profession forbidden by the canons. Discarding for ever his cap and bells and his parti-coloured jerkin, he resumed the close hood and the long robe lined with furs; and from the minstrel he again became the canon. He had, however, imbibed so thorough a love for his late calling, that he could not altogether throw off the old Adam. He could not bear to give up his lute, with which he sometimes enlivened the company on occasions of extraordinary solemnity, or when he did not wish to disoblige a friend or a superior; always, however, be it understood, confining himself to the strictest limits of decorum and propriety. But he was, on the whole, a worthy man, and an excellent companion; he lived to be upwards of eighty; and what seems incredible, although a canon, and living amongst canons, he never had a dispute with any one.

Two years after these events Ermelinda died at Limonta, lamented by the whole country. Among her possessions there was found, in a cabinet, Marco's last letter, which she had placed there together with a small golden chain. No one knew the secret of the chain except the wife of the falconer and her daughter Lauretta, and they never revealed it.

The Count del Balzo lived to a good old age. He witnessed the death of Azzone, and the succession of

Luchino. He even survived Luchino and his successor Giovanni.

The time came when Marco was spoken of as an historical character, a great captain, an extraordinary man. His name was mentioned constantly with reverence and admiration, and the Count even arrived at a stage when he could make capital out of the glorious memory of the hero. His old failing of self-importance, as incurable in him as his timidity, took possession of him more than ever in the last years of his life, when times were peaceful. You should then have heard the way he spoke of Marco! He had been his adviser, his bosom friend, the life and soul of all his enterprises.

"If they had only attended to me," he would mutter sometimes in a mysterious manner; "if they had only attended to me! But no matter, upon some points it is as well to be silent; although so many changes have since occurred, it is still more prudent to hold one's tongue," and then he would purse up his mouth and pass his hand over his forehead, as if some great secret must for ever remain locked in his brain.

And Lodrisio! I am certain that any reader who has a vestige of—what shall I say?—in short, any reader who is not devoid of human feeling, would like to see him come to a bad end—and I give the reader my word that it distracts me to own the truth—but we must try and bear it as best we can, for historical facts cannot be arranged according to one's fancy. So this is what did really happen to the miscreant.

He wandered about for many years in different parts of Italy, until in 1338, with the help of Il Scaligero, he succeeded in collecting together three thousand five hundred knights, a considerable company for that period, besides a good-sized army of infantry.

With this army, which was called the Company of Saint George, and which, at every step, was increased by the addition of thieves, freebooters, and marauders, he advanced upon the Milanese territory, burning and plundering and spreading desolation everywhere along his line of march. On reaching the vicinity of Para-

biago he gave battle to Luchino, who was awaiting him there, backed by all the forces of Milan and her allies. In this famous battle, which took its name from the place where it was fought, he was utterly defeated, and being taken prisoner by his conqueror, he was treated with humanity, a virtue all too rare in those days, and imprisoned with his two sons in the fortress of San Colombano, where he remained a captive till the year 1348. And then? Azzone being dead, and Luchino being dead, he was released by order of the Archbishop Giovanni . . . . . And then?

After having experienced various other vicissitudes he died, in extreme old age, a natural death, at Milan, April 5, 1364. Moreover, he was buried with great pomp, "Magnaliter" as it is called by the chronicler already cited, with a huge display of mourning, and every mark of distinction and honour.

Bernabo, at that time Lord of Milan, caused the tournament to be postponed, which was about to be celebrated; and the princes, nobles, and barons, who had come to Milan for the purpose of attending the joust, were obliged to defer their feats of prowess till after Lodrisio's obsequies had been celebrated with due solemnity.

Such things, I repeat, at first sight, might provoke us to an almost ungovernable indignation. However, when we come to reflect more coolly upon them, we recollect that they have been so ordered by a wise Providence, and we become aware that this desire to see everyone rewarded according to his merit in this world, argues impatience, shallowness, and presumption on our part; worse even than that, by so doing we set ourselves up to be wiser than Him who gave us our understanding, and we forget that although it is *here* that we must start on the race of life, it is only *hereafter* that we may hope to receive the prize.

"*I returned, and saw under the sun, that the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, neither yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to men of understanding, nor yet favour to men of skill; but time and chance happeneth to them all.*"

THE END.

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